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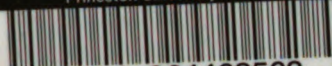
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FOR

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CONTENTS OF VOL. LXV.

	PAGE
A Bad Lot. By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON. Chapters I. to XVIII.	
.	1, 113, 225, 337, 449, 561
A Girl's Folly. By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP).	
Chapters I. to XIX.	86, 204, 314, 429, 537, 649
A Grub-Street Quixote. By ELLINOR DAVENPORT ADAMS	631
A Modern Egeria. By GORDON ROY	167
A Modern Eve. By LILIAN HOLT	412
A Modern Hedonist. By L. E. TIDDEMAN	604
An Arch Deceiver. By A. G. T. PRICE	52
By the Sea. By FAYR MADOC	647
Cecilia. By EDITH STANIFORTH	300
Christmas. By R. WARWICK BOND	65
Fascinating Mrs. Vereker	148
H. M. S. Victoria. By EMILIA AYLMER GOWING	162
Judge Not. In Two Parts. By MRS. BOYSE	268, 378
In the Harz Mountains. By AUGUSTUS HILL	138
Literary Islington. By GEORGE MORLEY	27

	PAGE
Madame de Brinvilliers. By A. M. JUDD	620
Margaretta. By CECIL LEIGH	70
Mashonaland. By G. GORDON SAMSON	367
M. P. for Mornington	488
“Talking Shop”	557
Ten Days in Town	195
Thackeray’s Lord Mohun. By JAMES GUSTAVUS WHITELEY .	475
The Captives of Surah Khan	500
The Crusades. By CHARLOTTE A. PRICE. In Two Parts.	253, 587
The Decay of the Art of Conversation	66
Time’s Traces. By MRS. WILL C. HAWKSLEY	411
To V— H—. By J. R. L. R.	377
Travancore. By S. M. D.	524
Trixie. By R. M. BURNAND	181
What the Moon saw in India (at Christmas)	42

LONDON SOCIETY.

JANUARY, 1894.

A Bad Lot.*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

ONE EVENING IN AUGUST.

I CANNOT rightly remember now whether it was at the "Fisheries," or the "Healtheries," or the "Colinderies," as they used to be called; but I know that it was about five or six years ago, at one or other of those popular exhibitions, which, as we all remember, were held for several years in succession in the old Horticultural Gardens, upon the site now occupied by the Imperial Institute.

It was an oppressively hot night at the end of August. "Everybody" was out of town, and London was said to be empty; nevertheless, there were some three or four thousand persons thronging the brilliantly-illuminated gardens, promenading in dense masses up and down the broad terraces, and crowding round the raised kiosks on either side, where two excellent bands played alternately, either popular airs or selections from well-known operas, such as evoked repeated and enthusiastic applause from the audience.

Although this audience could not exactly be said to be composed of the upper ten, it was all the same a highly attentive and appreciative one.

The people were all respectable and well dressed—they moved about in a quiet and orderly manner, and seemed to enjoy the

open air and the music thoroughly. There were family groups ; fathers and mothers with their children, parties of friends who had met by appointment, couples of lovers arm-in-arm, knots of neatly-dressed young women with their attendant swains, who strolled up and down laughing and talking merrily together, whilst not unfrequently the red coat of "Tommy Atkins," usually with a blushing sweetheart upon his arm, enlivened the scene with a flash of the familiar scarlet.

The one thing that was not common amongst the seething crowd of pleasure-seekers, was the broad white shirt-front of the gentleman in evening dress. In the months of August and September such a sight had become rare—that was perhaps why so many heads were turned to look back at Colonel Vane Darley, as he sauntered down the centre walk with a slight, half-grown girl hanging on to his arm.

He was a tall, well-made man, broad-shouldered and lean-flanked, whose forty years had made but little difference in his good looks ; his faultlessly-made clothes sat easily upon his upright figure, and there was about him altogether that indescribable air of careless grace which denotes the man of the world who is accustomed to good society.

Yet handsome as he undoubtedly was—and his well-featured face was one which women were wont to turn and look at twice—that face could not by any possibility be called a good one. Dissipation and a certain "devil-may-care" recklessness were written upon every line of it ; there was a cold cynicism on the close curves of the well-shaped mouth, and a perpetual mocking disbelief lurking in the deep-set grey eyes. It was said of Vane Darley that he had lived every inch of his life "twice over," with the result that at forty he took all things in jest that he should have taken in earnest, and that, *per contra*, where he should have been in jest he was too often in deadly earnest ; and when he was in earnest he was generally at his worst.

Unfortunately, he was in earnest now.

The girl who hung upon his arm, often winding both clinging hands around it, tripping with quick dancing footsteps to keep pace with the stride of his long legs, chattering volubly, glancing up incessantly into his face—was young enough to have been his daughter, but she was no relation to him at all ; she was only the daughter of an old friend.

She was still a mere child. As a matter of fact, her sixteenth birthday was only last week, her skirts were above her ankles, her thick bronze-tinted hair, tied back from her ears with a blue ribbon, hung down in a heavy plait to her waist; whilst the wide straw hat, trimmed with daisies, and the plain little tweed frock and jacket were entirely childish in their simplicity.

But the face, full of delight and animation, that was turned up so eagerly to his, gave even now the promise of rare and exceptional beauty. The girl's eyes shone like stars, her mobile features were exquisitely chiselled, the nose was fine and slender, the scarlet lips full and curved, whilst her complexion resembled the delicate colouring of the inner petals of the wild rose. Her figure, of course, was slight and unformed, the figure of a child who has not done growing; yet even here there was a slender uprightness, a lissome lightness of movement, which foretold future development of grace and symmetry.

And all the time she talked and talked—of the music, the passers-by, the coloured lamps amongst the trees, the fountains that shot up white against the dark sky beyond, and that were lit up incessantly by bright flashes of varying colours—red and blue and green and golden. Everything about her called forth rapturous exclamations of delight from her chattering lips.

She was in radiantly high spirits. He spoke but little, but he listened to her attentively, and he watched her keenly out of his deep-set eyes.

“And you are really enjoying it, Nell?”

“Oh, so much! so much!” she answered, with a little gasp in her breath. “It is like fairy-land. I never believed there could be any place so gay and delightful as this in horrid, dreary old London. It was so good of you to think of me, to bring me here—to give me such a happy evening!” and her fingers tightened gratefully on his arm.

How deliciously, perilously lovely she was. The world might be “well lost” indeed for such a fresh, sweet flower as this!

There comes a time when a man who has knocked about the world a great deal, becomes nauseated and disgusted with all the maturer charms of experienced womanhood, when he yearns for the freshness of an unspoilt maiden, as eagerly as one in a burning fever longs for a breeze of pure air or a draught of clear cold water.

"Is it so very dreary at your grandmother's, then?" he asked.

"Oh dreadful! You have no idea how dull Granny's house is! It is like the tomb—so quiet—so still—no one comes or goes, only the servants, who are nearly as old as she is. There is not a book to read, not even a flower upon the tables, and, outside, only the opposite houses all shuttered up and empty to look at and the tradesmen's carts rattling down the deserted street. I really think I should have died of it if I had not met you, Colonel Darley. How lucky it was: the sort of astonishing chance that hardly ever happens to one—was it not?"

"It was a horrid shame to send you to stay with your grandmother at this time of the year," said Darley, passing on in silence the discussion of the "chance" which surprised her so much and which possibly was less of a chance than she supposed.

"Well, you see there was nobody else to go, and Granny wrote about it, and papa thought she might be offended if none of us went to see her this summer; he is always afraid of her leaving her money to Uncle Bob, you know," added Nell naively.

Darley gave a short contemptuous laugh.

"Has he left her with any to leave, do you suppose?"

"Oh, I think so. Papa only managed to borrow twenty pounds from her the last time; he thinks that was because none of us have been to see her since Christmas. She is easily offended, and she fancies that we have neglected her, and she wrote such a nasty letter. Papa said somebody must go. Dottie flatly refused; she says Granny starved her last time, and you know what Millie is."

"And so they made a victim of you? Poor little Nell!"

"Well, I didn't think I should mind it so much. I offered to come. But then I had never been to London before. If I had known what a dull dreary place it was I shouldn't have wanted to see it."

"That is because you have only seen it at this time of the year. Yet you are not bored to-night?"

"To-night! Oh no! To-night everything is heavenly! Look at the lights—the people—how happy every one is! Listen to that lovely music! Besides," added the child with sweet unconscious flattery, "besides, *you* are with me! *You* are the magician

who has turned my desert into fairyland for me! Since I met you yesterday I have come back to life."

For a moment he was silent. He could not trust himself to speak, his heart was beating so strangely.

"Tell me," he said presently, "how are you all getting on at home?"

"Oh! pretty much as usual. Papa is always in difficulties, you know, and the servants' wages are always overdue, and then the tradesmen come up and bother for their money—there seems always some fuss about money going on."

"You are still as poor as ever at Marshlands, then?"

Nell sighed. She had been used to money troubles from her cradle, they did not come as anything new to her.

"Yes. One doesn't often get richer, I suppose," she said.

A moment of silence; the string band was playing the "Blue Danube" waltz—it had not gone out of fashion then—the swinging rhythm floated on the cool night air towards them, hundreds of coloured lamps twinkled gaily in long festoons against the darkness, the fountains plashed their white foam below, the voices of the moving crowds were silent, only the subdued crush of their footsteps upon the gravel made an undercurrent of sound like the hushed murmur of the waves along the shingle. All her life long Nell Forrester remembered the strange scene—half darkness, half lurid light—and the waltz that rose and fell in fitful cadences on the throbbing air.

"Would you not like to be rich, Nell?" murmured Colonel Darley's voice in her ear. "To have smart clothes and diamonds—to have a carriage of your very own—a yacht to take you across the sea—a horse to carry you across country?"

Her ringing childish laughter answered him.

"Let me wish for the moon at once," she cried merrily, "or Windsor Castle and the Queen's crown and sceptre! Of course I wish that we were rich. How nice it would be to have all those lovely things you speak of, and not to hear anything more about the butcher's bill and the rates that papa never has got the money for. But one might as well wish for the Millennium at once, and I don't suppose all the money Granny might leave papa, even if she leaves it all to him and none to Uncle Bob, would do more than just pay the bills owing to the tradesmen for two years back."

"I was not thinking of your father, Nell. I was thinking of you only. *You* might become rich!"

She shook her head.

"Earn money, you mean? No, I couldn't! I am too stupid. I can do nothing. I can't paint or sing. I could never write a book if I tried ever so hard. I thought once I might go on the stage, but papa shouted at me when I said so. He said he would rather see me in my coffin. I wonder why."

"Is there not another way in which girls who are young and beautiful can become rich, Nell?"

She was silent for a moment, puzzling over it to herself. Then she laughed.

"Oh, of course! You mean that they can marry rich men! How stupid of me not to think of that! Why don't Dottie and Millie marry, I wonder? But I don't believe anybody has ever asked them, and yet I do think Dottie the most beautiful girl in the world, don't you?"

"Yes. She is certainly handsome," he assented.

"Now I come to think of it, it certainly is extraordinary that nobody should want to marry my sisters," continued Nell. "But you see we don't know very many people. I suppose it is because we are so poor hardly anybody seems to come and see us. Yet the girls got plenty of partners, I know, when they went to the hunt ball last winter. They told me they danced all night, and most of the gentlemen came to call afterwards, but I don't believe any of them wanted to marry them. I wonder why that is?"

Her innocence was so thoroughly genuine that he was at a loss how to answer her. She had missed his meaning altogether.

He had not been thinking of her elder sisters; and if Gordon Forrester's daughter did not understand why few of the county people called at Marshlands, and why none of the stray men her sisters picked up at the public balls desired to become their husbands, why, it was scarcely possible to him to enlighten her.

So all he said by way of answer was :

"Well, you will come down to Erith and look at my yacht to-morrow, won't you?"

"Do you really mean it? How delightful! How kind you are. I have never seen a yacht in my life, you know. I wonder," with a sudden trouble on her clear face, "I wonder if I dare ask

Granny for some money to take me down? Do you think I shall get her to give it to me?"

"We won't trouble her," he answered smiling. "I shall take you; you will be my guest. You must meet me at the end of Wimpole Street to-morrow morning at ten o'clock. I shall be waiting for you in a hansom; we will spend a long, happy day together. That is settled, is it not, Nell?"

She looked a little doubtful.

"Am I to tell Granny that I am going with you?"

"Lady Forrester won't care where you go, so long as she has not got to put her hand in her pocket to pay for you," laughed Darley. "No, don't tell her that you are going with me—tell her some friends invited you; she won't ask their names."

Just then a couple arm-in-arm passed close by them in the crowd—a country clergyman and his wife. They were homely, middle-aged people, who had run up to town for a few days for shopping and business, and who had drifted somehow into the illuminated gardens to spend the warm summer evening.

"Good gracious, John!" exclaimed the lady below her breath after they had gone by; "did you see who that was?"

"Who, my dear? No, I did not see any one. Who was it?"

"It was Nell Forrester, and she was with that dreadful Colonel Darley!"

"Nell—Nell Forrester!" repeated Mr. Hartwood incredulously; "that child! Impossible, Mary! Why, she went to stay with her grandmother; Forrester told me."

"That is it, then," said Mrs. Hartwood with decision. "You may depend upon it she is out on the sly—hoodwinked the poor old lady, I daresay."

"But *Colonel Darley*, my love, did you say was with her—that unprincipled fellow? Nell is a mere child; it cannot have been Colonel Darley with her."

"I tell you I saw them both plainly; the Bengal light shone out just as we passed and lit up both their faces. She was hanging on to his arm as if they had been lovers."

"How shocking! If it had been Dorothea or Millicent, now, I should not have wondered; but little Nell! I hoped better things of that child. Ever since she came to my confirmation classes last year I have had hopes of her—she seemed so modest and attentive. Oh, Mary, let us turn back and try and find

her; you might get her to come away with us. Let us turn back."

"Not for the world!" said Mrs. Hartwood, pinching her lips together primly and throwing up her chin in a way to which the Rev. John Hartwood was not unaccustomed. "I will not have you mix yourself up with those Forresters—they are a bad lot, all of them! It is dreadful enough having such people in the parish at all, but we need not be dragged into their disreputable affairs."

"But, my love, did not Christ come into the world to bring sinners into His fold? Surely a minister of the gospel should seek to save the souls of those under his charge."

"You shall *not* go after the souls of those Forresters, I tell you!" cried the clergyman's wife with asperity. "To begin with, I don't believe they have got any souls at all to speak of—they are *bad*, every one of them! it is in the blood! Those girls will get into trouble, every one of them. Remember their wretched mother. What can you expect from the children of that miserable woman? 'What's bred in the bone won't out of the flesh.'"

"Yet, if I could save poor little Nell," sighed the more tender-hearted clergyman regretfully.

"She is past saving already if she is going about at night alone with such a man as Colonel Vane Darley. Doesn't everybody know that he has got a wife alive somewhere in America? How can such a man be a respectable or safe companion for a young girl to go about with alone? Besides, recollect his character! A libertine! a profligate! whom no decent parents would allow to enter their house. I consider Nell Forrester must be lost already, to be seen with such a man!"

And so the good and virtuous woman, whom no temptation had ever assailed, took her husband home to their lodgings, congratulating herself on her firmness in having kept him uncontaminated and unsullied by contact with vice, as displayed by little Nell Forrester.

"He would have done no good by interfering," she thought, "and he would only have got himself mixed up with those disreputable Forresters for nothing. Somebody might have seen us talking to them—it would make a scandal in the parish!"

But the Reverend John Hartwood lay awake long into the night, tossing restlessly to and fro upon his pillow.

"Poor little Nell, so young, so pretty!" he thought; "I wish Mary had allowed me to go back and speak to her. I don't believe there is any harm in her, nor in her sisters either, for that matter, but if all the good women turn their backs on those poor girls, how can anybody expect them to turn out well, with their mother's bad name clinging to them, and only their foolish father to look after them? I wonder why real good charitable women like my Mary, who visit the poor and the needy, and would work their fingers to the bone for a sick child or an old woman in the village, are so hard down on the women of their own class?"

And there are many other people in the world far wiser than the Reverend John Hartwood, vicar of Marshlands, who have wondered the same thing.

CHAPTER. II.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

THE "Water Witch" spread her billowing sails to the freshening breeze, and danced lightly across the rippling blue water. The low shores trended away more and more indistinctly on either side of her, as the cutter sped swiftly away seawards down the broad estuary of the Thames.

Tilbury and Gravesend were left behind, Southend and Shoeburyness hove in sight, and far away ahead the Nore light-ship hung faintly blue between the hazy distance of the sky and sea.

"We shall make Sheerness to-day with this breeze, and the tide all in our favour," said Darley.

The girl sat by his side in a low deck chair, the crisp air had fanned her cheeks into a deeper rose, the salt spray dashed against her bright face, her long loosened hair fluttered like a mermaid's veil about her shoulders, her eyes were sparkling and her lips were parted with sheer delight at the dancing motion.

As he spoke she turned upon him a swift glance of regret, and then she took a battered silver watch out of her waist belt and looked at it with a half sigh.

"But there is the getting back again, remember. Oh, why do happy days come to an end so quickly? already it is afternoon—three hours more and it will be time to go homewards."

"Your watch gains, Nell."

"Generally, unless it loses," she answered, laughing; "although sometimes it varies the entertainment by stopping altogether. It was Millie's watch, you see, and she used to take it to school with her, and what with over-windings, stirrings up with hair-pins, droppings into water basins, and chuckings at other girls' heads, the poor thing hasn't got many works left to speak of, I fancy. Still, I must be thankful for small mercies, Colonel Darley, and being the youngest I inherit all the cast-off rubbish of my elders."

He rose and left her side for a moment; when he returned he carried a small parcel in his hand.

"Look here," he said, sitting down again beside her, "I have got something for you, Nell. I noticed yesterday what a knocked about, worn-out old time-piece you had, and so I got you this."

He tossed a jeweller's case into her lap. She opened it eagerly, and uttered a cry of delight. It contained a gold bangle, fitted with an exquisite miniature watch, set round with brilliants.

"For me? really for me?" she cried, with all the wild excitement of a child. "Oh, how lovely! how beautiful! and it is to be my own? Oh, it is almost too good to be true!"

For a moment it looked as if she would have flung her arms round his neck in her rapture, but he drew back a little; there were his men behind them. He would have been sorry if she had made any public exhibition of affection. It was not so that he coveted the first kiss from those sweet lips.

"Let me fasten it on to your arm," he said gravely, and clasped the shining bracelet upon her wrist.

"How good you are to me," she said in a lower voice and with dewy eyes; "how very good. Why are you so kind to me, Colonel Darley?"

His fingers that lingered still upon her round white arm trembled a little, as he answered without looking at her:

"I am not good to you, Nell—not good at all."

"Oh!" with a soft, mocking laugh. "If *you* are not good, I should like to know who is. Why do you do so much to please me and make me happy, then?"

He bent his dark head until his lips were close to her ear.

"Can you not guess, child?"

She looked at him with questioning eyes and shook her head.

"It is—because I love you, Nell."

For the space of nearly five minutes there was a dead silence between them.

She did not blush or look down, or tremble or draw back from him as an older girl would have done. She only looked away from him towards the Nore, with eyes that saw nothing of the wide plain of twinkling water before them, and there was a little pucker of puzzled bewilderment between her brows.

She was troubled ; she did not quite understand—that was all. Presently she looked back at him. His eyes were fixed upon her face, devouring every detail of her beauty, his heart was beating, every nerve within him was tense with emotion and quivered with suspense. In all his stormy life Vane Darley had never coveted anything so madly and passionately as he did this sixteen-year old maiden.

“Do you mean,” she said slowly and thoughtfully, as though working out some half-comprehended problem in her mind—“do you mean—that you would like to marry me?”

And it was Colonel Darley then over whose face there rushed a wave of scorching colour, dyeing it deeply, darkly red, from brow to chin. Never, perhaps, had so deep a sense of shame and abasement swept over him before.

He bent his head. For a moment it seemed to him as if he must give it up—that he must be for once true to long-stifled better instincts, and resign all hopes of this girl whom he was seeking to injure so deeply, so convincing was the sentence from those innocent lips, the unsullied child candour that shone in those lovely questioning eyes.

And then the Tempter spoke—as he generally does take occasion to speak in these storm-tossed crises of our lives.

“I should be good to her, as good as if I were actually her husband. I should look upon her in very truth as my wife. And what a much better life she would lead with me than she would at Marshlands. What an existence of grinding poverty would be her fate there ; and what chance is there for any of those girls, with the bad name of their mother clinging to them all? Besides, who would want to marry a daughter of Gordon Forrester's, who lives upon the money he borrows right and left, and never pays back a sou? to say nothing of that wretched creature, who is still alive somewhere, who was a ballet-dancer to begin with, and who only returned to her native gutter-mud

when she bolted from her husband's house with her groom. What chance has any one of those poor girls of marrying decently, for all their good looks, with such a record as that behind them? I should be doing the child a good turn if I took her away from them all before she learns the truth about her mother."

And then, instead of answering her words, he bent over her and spoke to her in a low, caressing voice.

"Think of it, Nell, what a good time we should have! We would go right away from England—to Italy, to Greece, to Spain—wherever you would like to go. You often say you would like to travel; and you should have everything on earth you fancied—plenty of pretty clothes and jewellery, and we would keep to the yacht all the summer weather, and when it grows cold we could winter in some warm southern place, and explore some new and lovely land. I think we should be happy together, little woman, for though I am so much older than you are, I am very, very fond of you, dear, and I think you care for me a little bit too, don't you?"

"Yes—I care," she answered in a very low voice.

"And I shall live only for you, my sweet love," he went on, his hand closing softly over hers. "My whole life shall be devoted to making you happy—to proving my gratitude."

But she did not understand him.

"I must have time," she said, covering her face with her hands. "I can't understand it quite—that you, you should care in that way for *me*!—that you should think me worthy. It seems wonderful—like a dream, or a fairy story. Oh!" turning to him piteously, "take me home now, that I may think—that I may try to understand."

She was pale now, pale and a little frightened. The passion in his face, although she was but half conscious of its meaning, filled her with a vague sense of alarm. He saw that she trembled, but possibly he scarcely comprehended the extent of her absolute innocence and ignorance. Yet he divined that it would be wiser not to press her too hardly now.

He drew back from her, smiling kindly and reassuringly.

"Of course I don't want to hurry or startle you, dear child. You shall go home now and think it over quietly, and to-morrow I will come to the usual place near your house, and you shall

come and meet me again, and you shall tell me then whether you think you can care enough for an old chap like me to be willing to throw in your lot with mine." And then he lifted his voice and shouted "Put about!" to the men, and the cutter swung round to the helm and turned her bows towards the land once more.

It took a couple of hours to beat up the river again to Erith, and during all that time Colonel Darley was wise enough to resume his ordinary manner of kind and almost fatherly interest towards his young guest. Little by little she recovered from the trouble which his words had caused her, and the laughter came back to her lips and the childish gaiety into her voice and eyes. They were so happy together, these two, such good friends, she thought. What, indeed, was there to alarm her about this old friend whom she had known in a way nearly all her life, but whom she had never seemed to care for so much and to get on with so well as in these last few most happy days.

For this was not at all the first trip that Nell had taken on the "Water Witch." For three days running Colonel Darley had taken her down to Erith, and she had spent the whole day on the yacht, returning late at night to her grandmother's house, desperately tired and sleepy, but almost superhumanly happy.

As to Lady Forrester, she had not troubled herself to ask any questions about how her grandchild spent her time. She was a selfish and niggardly old woman, and she was secretly relieved that Nell should manage to amuse herself without putting her to any trouble or expense. Dorothea and Millie were like whirlwinds in the house; they always wanted new clothes when they came up to Wimpole Street, and Lady Forrester had been obliged to pay for them. And then they rushed about all over London in cabs, and left the man-servant to pay for them. But Nell wanted nothing and cost her nothing, and managed to amuse herself all the time, and never charged her with cab fares. Could anything be more satisfactory?

"I like your youngest girl," she wrote to her son; "she is a good child, and gives me no trouble. She suits me much better than her sisters; she is not for ever ordering new clothes and sending in the bills to me, and borrowing my small change as they do. Nell does not seem to want money or to care about shops and finery. She has come across some friends—I really

can't remember if she told me their names—but they have taken her' about all this week—down into the country, she tells me, which is good for her, as London is very hot just now. They seem to like having her, and they pay all her expenses, which the Lord knows in these hard times I can't afford to do; so I ask no questions and let her do as she likes. Next week she says they will be gone, and then I will send her with Marshall to see the sights—the British Museum and the Tower and so on. I must say I like a girl who can find her own amusements and make her own friends." But what those amusements and friends were like, it did not enter Lady Forrester's head to inquire.

It was an hour earlier than usual to night when Nell got back to her grandmother's house. She was not nearly so tired as she had been on the two previous days, but then, on the other hand, she was not nearly so happy.

She was bewildered and troubled—all the foundations of her life seemed to be shaken, and she was a prey to a dozen conflicting emotions and uncertainties. And in addition to all this not unnatural agitation, something had happened on the way home from Erith which had apparently disturbed her companion far more than herself, and which had totally, and to her quite unaccountably, spoilt the happiness of their last hour together.

It was just as they were getting into the train at Erith. Nell had jumped into a first-class carriage, and Darley was proceeding to follow her, when he uttered an exclamation of annoyance, caught hold of her hand and dragged her out again. Two people, a lady and a gentleman, already occupied the two seats on the further side of the carriage.

"Come to another carriage," Darley whispered to her, drawing her away quickly down the platform. "Did you not see those people, Nell? It was that spiteful-tongued parson's wife with her husband."

"What, the Hartwoods!" cried Nell in astonishment. "Oh! I wish I had seen them, Colonel Darley. Mr. Hartwood has been so awfully kind to me. Why should we not have got into the carriage where they were?"

"What, and set every tongue wagging about us down at Marshlands!" he answered.

"Why should their tongues wag?" said Nell in surprise. "There is nothing wonderful, is there, about us? It certainly is funny

our meeting them down here all this way from home ; but now I remember, Mr. Hartwood's brother lives at Gravesend, and I suppose they have been down to see him. I wish I could have spoken to them and asked them when they are going home."

But Colonel Darley did not echo this simple and ignorant wish. He sat opposite to her in the empty carriage into which he had placed her, with a thundercloud on his brow.

"What cursed luck!" he thought savagely. "That cat of a woman is capable of going up to Wimpole Street to her grandmother the first thing in the morning—they will take her away from me, hold me up as a monster of wickedness—and I shall lose her! My God! if I lose her I think I shall blow my brains out!"

He leant forward just before they got to Charing Cross and took her small ungloved hands in his.

"Nell, you won't let anybody set you against me, will you? You won't let them make you hate me?" he said earnestly—more earnestly perhaps than he had ever said anything in his life.

"Oh, to have a clean record, and to be free!" was the muttered groan that came from his heart of hearts at that moment.

"I love you so much, little Nell!" he said aloud. "Whatever happens, promise me never to forget that I love you with all my heart."

She trembled a little—yet she smiled at him happily.

"No one could set me against you, or make me hate you, Colonel Darley. How could they? Do I not know for myself how very, very good you are?"

His face drooped—he could not meet her eyes.

"They might tell you about—about bad things I have done," he murmured, looking down at the small childish hands he still held. "Those people, for instance—they might come and tell you stories against me."

"And do you suppose that I should believe any stories against you? I will never believe anything, Colonel Darley, that you do not tell me yourself."

He stooped his head and kissed her hands.

"And as to doing wrong things," she went on, "of course we have all done things that are not right. I know that I have often, but if one is sorry when one has done wrong, that wipes it all away, doesn't it?"

But the man with all a lifetime of sins upon his head could say nothing in answer to this simple theory of penitence and of purification. For alas, how were those little childish faults of hers, of which she was thinking, to be spoken of in the same breath as the dark stains upon his own soul!

And then worse things happened—for when they got out at Charing Cross Station, somehow, in the crush of people all going the same way, they found themselves quite close to Mr. and Mrs. Hartwood.

Nell gave a little cry of welcome, and held out her hand.

"Mrs. Hartwood! how odd we should meet up in London. I suppose you have been down to Gravesend. And how are you both? and was little Tommy Studd better when you came away? and are you going back before Sunday, Mr. Hartwood? or have you got anybody to do the duty for you? but—what is it?"

Her voice faltered and gave way; she fell back a step or two. Mrs. Hartwood was looking at her full in the face with a stony stare as if she had never seen her before. She passed her arm through her husband's, although the vicar made as if he would have stopped.

"Come, John," she said to him, "there is a cab, we must get home quickly, there is no occasion to stop to speak to strangers in a crowd like this," and with her chin well in the air the vicar's lady turned her back upon Nell Forrester and her companion, and swept her husband away towards the four-wheeled cab to which she had beckoned.

Nell remained almost speechless with dismay and astonishment.

"What on earth does she mean?" she cried, turning to Colonel Darley. "She seems not to recognize me, and yet she must have seen me perfectly, for she looked me straight in the face, and she called me a stranger! What *could* she mean by it?"

"She meant to cut you because you were with me, that is what she meant, d—n her! I told you not to go near them. I knew that d—d woman would insult you."

Darley was absolutely beside himself with rage; although he had many faults, to swear in the presence of a lady was not usually one of them, but for the moment he could not control himself, so great was his fury.

They got into a hansom and drove to Wimpole Street almost in silence ; he did not speak to her till they were nearly at their destination.

"I cannot understand it in the very least," said Nell at last.

"Do not trouble yourself to understand ; for heaven's sake forget the hateful woman altogether."

They had stopped within a few doors of Lady Forrester's house, and he helped her out of the cab.

"Go home and forget her," he repeated more gently ; "dream about me, and about our happy day together, dear. To-morrow morning I shall come here, just where we are now, at eleven o'clock, and wait for you. Come out and meet me, and we will have a little walk and talk together, as I said. Good-night now, dear child."

CHAPTER III.

A CHILD IN YEARS, A WOMAN IN STRENGTH.

"GRANDMAMMA, I have something very important to say to you."

Lady Forrester laid down her newspaper and looked over her spectacles across the breakfast table at her granddaughter.

"Dear me, Nell, what is it ?"

Lady Forrester's face was a kind old face, despite the paint and the rouge and the wig of fair curls with which it was decked out. "A painted old Harridan," some one of her many friends had said of her—and so she was—and a "wicked old woman," some one else had called her, and perhaps that was true as well, but she was by no means an unpleasant old woman to talk to for all that. She had twinkling blue eyes, and a shrewd smile, and a great love of gossip and scandal, and an unbounded, although unspoken, sympathy at the bottom of her heart with all pleasant sins and sinners young or old.

"This sounds rather formidable, Nell. What is this 'very important' thing, pray ?"

Nell came round and stood by her chair. She wore a brown holland frock, with a broad brown sash tied round her slim waist ; her long hair reached below her sash, and her frock only reached down to her ankles. Anything more youthful and childish, and

more utterly removed from the cares and troubles of womanhood than was her appearance, it would have been impossible to imagine.

"I suppose you want some money out of me for some treat, or do you want leave to go away and stay altogether with these new friends of yours—what is their name by the way?"

"I only want to ask you to give me your advice, Granny," said Nell gravely.

"Well, my dear, I can certainly promise you that; advice is cheap," chuckled the old lady, "and most people are lavishly extravagant of the commodity. But what am I to advise you about, pray?"

"A gentleman has asked me to marry him."

"Good heavens alive!" The newspaper fell out of Lady Forrester's hands and her eye-glasses tumbled down with a clatter on the parquet floor. That she herself did not fall down in a fit after them was only due to the intense amusement which immediately acted like a tonic upon her amazement.

"Good gracious, child! Is this a practical joke you are playing upon me?" and Lady Forrester began to laugh.

"Not in the least. I am perfectly serious."

"But—a gentleman, you say? A gentleman asks you—you—little Nell, a baby in short frocks! Why, he must have been joking!"

"He was not joking in the least, grandmamma," replied Nell, this time with something of offence.

"Oh, but this is lovely! My dear, pray forgive me for laughing, but really it is very amusing; and this is the upshot, I suppose, of all these days in the country you have been spending with your friends?"

Nell nodded, her face was still grave, but it had become rather red.

"And this *gentleman*? Another babe and suckling, I suppose? How old is he? Seventeen or eighteen, eh? Does his mother know he has proposed? Is he in turn-down collars? Has he left Eton? Are you quite sure he is eighteen yet?"

"I am not at all sure of his exact age," replied Nell with a crushing hauteur, "he did not tell me how old he is, but I know that he was at college the same year as papa, and so I believe he must be very nearly forty."

Lady Forrester left off laughing, and sat bolt upright in her chair.

"Eh? What? *Forty*, did you say? Then it *is* serious! I suppose the man can afford to keep you, then?"

A small smile stole over Nell's face.

"I suppose so," she answered demurely.

"Is he rich?"

It was Nell's turn to laugh lightly.

"I haven't asked him, but I should say that he was well-off. He has got a yacht; and he gave me—this." She held out her arm, and the morning sun that shone into the dreary London dining-room glistened upon the ring of diamonds that encircled her watch. "May I keep it, grandmamma?"

"*Certainly*, my dear; keep everything you can get. I mean—ahem—of course you may receive a present from the gentleman you are engaged to. This is very exciting, Nell. I am really delighted. You are cleverer than your sisters; and really, now I come to look at you, I think you are quite as good-looking as Dorothea. Only fancy a baby like you having caught a husband before either of the others; and a rich husband, too."

"Oh, grandmamma, please do not talk like that." And Nell blushed hotly. "You know I only wanted to ask you if I was not too young to be married; he is so much older and wiser and better than I am; and, oh, I can't tell you how good he is; but I have not settled it at all yet."

"But you *must* settle it, Nell, at once, this very day," cried Lady Forrester with agitation, whilst at her heart she thought: "He might find out something about her mother, or hear something about poor dear Gordon's unfortunate little ways. I do hope he won't try to borrow money of Nell's lover *before* they are married. It might break off the match."

"Come and sit down near me, dearest Nell, and tell me all about it. I suppose you have met him at these friends' you have been seeing every day?"

"Dear grandmamma, please forgive me for not having quite explained it to you. The fact is—he *is* the friend."

"What—this gentleman? No ladies were there? I thought you told me——"

"I think you misunderstood me, grandmamma; and I am very, very sorry now, for I know that I deceived you—at least, I

let you believe there were others, but all the time it was only him."

"There was no lady with you?"

"No—no one—only our two selves."

"Oh!" A pause. Lady Forrester became thoughtful; but she was a happy-go-lucky sort of person, and she was not long disturbed. "Well, of course, Nell, you ought to have told me the truth; but, there, 'all is well that ends well,' and I will say no more about it. As he has asked you to marry him it's all right, of course. And now tell me his name?"

Nell had nestled down by her grandmother's side confidently. Lady Forrester put her arm round her and kissed her affectionately. The old lady was pleased with her. She ought to have had a chaperone, of course. She ought not to have gone out alone with this man, whoever he was; but she always liked people who did well for themselves in life, better than those who made failures; and she was quite ready to forgive her for her trifling indiscretion.

"I shall leave her all my money," she thought, "and give her her wedding dresses into the bargain. Her sisters with all their wild ways can't find a decent man to marry either of them, and here is this child in short frocks who has done the business already, all by herself too, with nobody to help her on but her own good sense—a clever little puss, to be sure."

"Now, let me hear his name, Nell, and all about him," she said once more, pinching the girl's soft round cheek playfully.

Nell was kneeling by her side, leaning a little against her shoulder, and fingering the bead work trimmings on the front of her violet satin gown.

"His name is Darley—Colonel Vane Darley," she said softly, with a little caressing intonation in her voice, as she lingered over the beloved name.

There was a pause, quite whilst she might have counted ten.

Then a sharp shrill voice that scarcely sounded like Lady Forrester's at all:

"*Vane Darley!* Do you mean your father's friend, Vane Darley?"

"Yes," said Nell quite composedly, with a little nod.

Lady Forrester pushed the girl away from her side with a violence that almost threw her over on the floor.

"Good God! What a fool you are!"

"Grandmamma!"

"Don't sit there staring and gaping at me, miss. How dare you tell me that a gentleman asked you to marry him, when it is only that old sinner who has been making a fool of you!"

"Grandmamma, I do not understand at all why you are so angry. There is no reason on earth," continued Nell, rising to her feet and speaking with great decision, "why I should not marry Colonel Darley; and it makes no difference to me whether you like him or no, because I intend to marry him." Nell did not want advice any longer, the opposition acted like magic upon her, and she made up her mind at once.

"*Marry* Colonel Darley—marry him!" cried Lady Forrester scornfully. "He asked you to *marry* him, did he? Well, he is a greater blackguard than I took him for."

"You shall not abuse him," cried the girl with blazing eyes. "I don't care a scrap whether you like him or no, but you shall not call him bad names."

Lady Forrester laughed—a nasty bitter laugh it was this time.

"Don't be a fool, child; it doesn't signify at all, certainly, whether I like him: as a matter of fact I do like him—everybody does—for he is a very agreeable man. It is not a matter of *liking* at all. What I want to know is, how on earth he proposes to marry you, or anybody else, when he has got a wife alive already?"

Nell stood motionless and rigid as if she had been turned into stone. The angry fire in her eyes died out, the hot colour in her face faded slowly, leaving her deadly pale; for a few minutes neither of them spoke—neither the young woman nor the old; then, in a suffocated whisper, the girl said at last:

"It is false! I do not believe it."

"Oh, it is false, is it?" echoed her grandmother with angry asperity. "I tell lies, do I? Well, find out for yourself then. Ask this precious lover of yours if he intended to marry you in a church honestly, or if he did not mean you to run away with him on his yacht without any such trifling preliminary as a wedding?"

The words struck cruelly, almost fatally, upon Nell's ears. Was it possible that they were true? Had he indeed mentioned any such word as "marriage" to her? She could not recollect. There came a mist of darkness before her eyes—for a moment she covered them with her hand, and she staggered a little, poor child, and caught at the table beside her. Then she recovered herself, for she remembered his words of last night :

"You won't let anybody set you against me, will you? You won't let them make you hate me?" he had said to her.

She drew up her head with a gesture of defiance as his words came back to her. "No, no, no!" she said to herself; "ten thousand times no! I will be true to him; I will not believe this terrible thing—only from his own lips will I believe it. No one shall come between us."

Aloud, she said quietly and with a dignity which filled Lady Forrester with astonishment :

"I shall do as you say; I shall ask him, grandmamma. You are mistaken, I know. We will see what he says himself."

Then she turned and left the room without another word.

Colonel Vane Darley waited that morning for a full hour, walking up and down Wimpole Street, and as he waited he grew every moment more and more impatient to see his little girl, and more and more anxious as to the reason of her delay.

"Something must have gone wrong," he muttered to himself as he consulted his watch for the fiftieth time. "She has heard something, perhaps—perhaps that beast of a parson's wife has been before me. Or, great heavens! she may be ill!"

At last, being really very much in love, and not being at all of a timid nature, Colonel Darley could bear it no longer, and went up boldly to the house and rang the bell.

"Is Miss Forrester at home?"

His question was answered by another.

"Are you Colonel Darley, sir?"

"Yes, I am."

"Then would you please to walk this way, sir. Miss Forrester will see you here."

He was ushered into a dingy back room on the ground floor.

It was one of the most dreary little rooms he had ever seen.

The window opened on to a sad blank wall, grey and discoloured by the rain. There was a table covered with a dusty brown cloth in the centre, and a few chairs round the walls, two bookcases filled with shabby school-books in the spaces on either side of the fireplace, and two or three sombre oil paintings in tarnished frames hung opposite them. There was no clock upon the mantelpiece—only some cheap imitation bronze vases. It was a room to give one the shivers. And Vane Darley, who loved light and colour and beauty, was inconceivably depressed by it—it struck a cold chill in him to stand and wait in that room. He waited for several minutes, and whilst he waited his eyes wandered uneasily about the prison-like gloom of the cheerless place. To his life's end he never forgot it—that room was destined to be branded into his heart for ever.

Presently the door opened softly and Nell came in.

"My darling!" he cried joyfully, going forward to meet her and opening his arms as though he would have taken her to his heart—but something in her face arrested him. It looked older, graver, sadder, more the face of a woman altogether, than it had done last night.

"Why did you not come out?" he said, taking her hand instead of attempting the warmer greeting he had for a moment contemplated. Her hand seemed to him to be strangely cold and unresponsive. "I have been waiting for you a whole hour, you little wretch!"

"I know. I wanted to speak to you here—in grandmamma's house, not in the street—and I knew that if I did not come out you would come in and see me here."

"What is the matter, Nell?" There seemed to be no use in beating about the bush; it was better to go straight to the point. There was something about her so different—she was no longer the happy guileless child of yesterday. "Has that parson-woman been here?" he asked almost feverishly.

"Mrs. Hartwood?" with surprise. "Oh, no. Why should she have come here? Ah!"—striking her hands sharply together—"I see it now! I see now why she cut me last night!"

"What do you mean, Nell? What do you see? You speak in riddles, child. Come and tell me all about it."

He sat down upon one of the straight-backed chairs, and tried

to draw her down upon his knee, as though she were indeed the child he called her.

But she stood before him erect and straight, her level glance meeting his firmly and fully.

"Colonel Darley, I have been told a dreadful thing about you——"

"And have believed it, of course," he answered with an uneasy laugh. "You are like the rest of your sex," he went on bitterly, "always eager to listen to a scandal."

"I have believed and listened to nothing against you. You will tell me yourself that it is false, and I shall believe you."

"What is this tremendous indictment? Let me at least hear it," he said more gently.

"I have been told that you are a married man, and that your wife is alive. Is this true?"

He looked away from her for half a minute, and drew in a long breath between his set teeth.

"Well, and if it were true——" he began.

"Is it true?" she persisted.

"Yes."

That one word killed Nell Forrester's childhood. She was never afterwards the same. So much of trust and love and faith died in her at that moment that never, never to the end of all time could her crushed and bruised soul recover from the shock of it. It turned her from a child into a woman—from the trustfulness of innocence into a hardened sceptic. She had believed him good, and he was evil; she had taken him for a god, and he was but an idol of clay.

She was not angry; she did not reproach him; she did not even cry; she only turned away from him dumbly—stricken to the very heart.

She was but a child in years, but she was at all events woman enough to understand what this meant to her.

"But, Nell! listen! only listen to me!" he pleaded, taking her limp hand and drawing her towards him. "I never told you that I was free. I cannot indeed marry you, but I can love you and be as true to you as if you were my wife. As there is a God above us, I swear that I will be the same to you as though fifty priests had tied us together. We would go right away to the

other side of the world ; we should be as happy as the days were long ; you would always be called by my name——”

“You are married !” she repeated dully.

“Yes, to a woman I have not seen for fifteen years. Is that ‘marriage,’ do you suppose? Is there much sanctity in such a union as that? Can a few words spoken before a parson with no oneness of heart and no affection be one half so real, so binding and so sacred, do you think, as that perfect fusion of two souls into one, that constitutes true marriage in its highest and noblest form? and that is the marriage that would be ours, my dearest.”

She shook her head sadly.

“I know nothing about all that. I cannot argue, for I don’t understand. I only know that it is all over, and that you must go.”

“Nell, you cannot mean to banish me altogether? You will let me see you again? You will think it over, won’t you?”

“If I were to think it over for ever, could it possibly make any difference?” she asked sadly.

“But only think, Nell. You are such a child ; you cannot understand. You do not know how hard it is to be happy in this world ; how rare love is ; how worse than useless it is to throw it away. And I love you, my little darling—bad as I may be—I love you.”

She held up her hands suddenly with a piteous gesture.

“Do not—do not say any more,” she cried, a little brokenly ; “do not make it harder. I am only a child, I know. Very likely I am foolish and ignorant ; though I seem to have grown older—much older than I was yesterday ; still I know enough to be sure of one thing : one must not find happiness that way—not—through—*shame*.”

The last word was spoken low, beneath her breath, and her head drooped low upon her bosom.

“Am I to go, then?” he asked at last, after a long silence—a silence during which the hardened man of the world seemed to live through a whole cycle of passion and remorse, of fruitless regrets that he must lose this child—this offspring of a bad stock—whose womanhood had taught her, nevertheless, the first great lessons of an instinctive purity.

Before that purity Vane Darley’s evil thoughts and designs

sank abashed and disarmed. He knew he could do no more; the game was up. He saw that he had lost her, and he had at least the manliness not to press her further.

She had valued her woman's whiteness more than she valued his love. What else was there then for him to do but to go?

"Do you send me away, Nell?" he asked in a voice that was hoarse and choked with emotion.

She bent her head in assent.

In another second the door closed softly behind him, and Nell was alone.

(To be continued.)

Literary Islington.

By GEORGE MORLEY,

Author of "THE HISTORY OF LEAMINGTON," "SHAKESPEARE
COMMEMORATIONS," etc.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART II.

AS London society congregates in Belgravia, so the society of a century ago was wont to congregate at Islington. Those were what are now called "the good old times" of patrons and patronesses, when the literary man was no more or less than a slave to the fads, variations and caprices of some man or woman of rank and title; though if we are to judge of the times by the bitter words of Dr. Samuel Johnson,

"There mark what ills the scholar's life assail—
Toil, envy, want, the Patron, and the jail,"

they were not such "good old times" after all to those who lived by their pens; and Merrie Islington was a place of fashionable resort for wealth and rank, equally with the poor scholar, the poor author and the poor painter.

In the first part of "Literary Islington," published in the June number of LONDON SOCIETY, I made mention of Canonbury House, around which so much history clings; history connected with the literature of England. Some idea of the fashionable status of the past Islington may be gathered from the fact that in 1570 Alderman Sir John Spencer, Knight, came to reside in the ancient Canonbury House. Sir John is not known to have been a literary man himself, though he is most likely to have been a literary man's patron, for he was very rich; and in those days it was a condescension and a custom on the part of a rich man to befriend some poor and struggling author; but his daughter Elizabeth, the heiress of Canonbury, who became connected by marriage with Lord William Compton, first Earl of Northampton, and ancestor of the present Lord William Compton, of Compton Wynnates, Warwickshire, has some

pretension to the title of "literary lady," as I shall show presently by giving an example of her work.

Alderman Sir John Spencer, Knight, was the prototype of those titled merchant princes of to-day, who engage in commerce and found families. He was an opulent cloth-worker with establishments in London, and a princely seat at Canonbury House, Islington; the custom of creating wealth in cities and residing at ease in the country being then, as now, the same. Sir John, so far as I know, was not so fortunate as Sir Richard Whittington in being thrice Lord Mayor of London, but he was Lord Mayor more than once, and was particularly honoured by Queen Elizabeth, who it may be assumed was, upon divers occasions, his guest at Canonbury House; for the connection of Good Queen Bess, whom Horace Walpole was so ungallant as to describe as vain and ugly, with the wealthy cloth merchant was of an intimate and personal nature; *ergo* it is pretty safe to conjecture that her maiden Majesty knew Merry Islington equally as well as Sir Walter Raleigh and other members of that literary galaxy that was wont to sojourn there, when creams and cheese-cakes made by deft and pretty hands were all "the rage."

My reason for mentioning Sir John Spencer, an unliterary character of a literary sphere, is, that he, his fair daughter, and Canonbury House are associated with a veritable romance, which has been the theme of the novelist and verse-writer—a romance more charming than fiction has ever produced—and which, owing to the part played in it by Queen Elizabeth, is of more than ordinary interest.

Like Polonius, Sir John was blessed with one child, a "fair daughter," who was not only the apple of his eye, but the apple of all the eyes of the curled darlings of the Queen's court. Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Phillip Sydney, Sir Fulke Greville, the first Lord Brooke, Earl of Warwick, must, from their close connection with the court, have all been well known to Elizabeth Spencer; and the literary characters of the day, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Drayton, Heywood and Ben Jonson, all frequenters of "Merrie Islington," must all have known her personally or by repute; and many of them no doubt

"Lisped a woeful ballad"

to the fair Islingtonian of Canonbury House, who besides being

one of the loveliest ladies of her time, was the richest heiress in the land. Such gentlemen as these, however, in spite of their handsome appearance and high intellectual attainments, were not the kind most pleasing to the heart of Sir John, who wished to marry Elizabeth to a man of business and substance like himself. When he went to London, therefore, he secluded his daughter in Canonbury House much in the same way as Danaë was secluded in the Brazen Tower.

When Shakespeare wrote that

“Love laughs at locksmiths,”

he must have known something of the sequestration of Elizabeth Spencer ; moreover, it is not at all unlikely that he was well acquainted with Elizabeth's lover, Lord William Compton ; for Stratford-on-Avon and Compton Wynnates are but a short distance apart, and the poet, in his Warwickshire rambles, before he permanently took up his abode in London, must often have met the lordling ; anyhow, Shakespeare would seem to have been well apprized of the whole romance, for the plan adopted by Lord William Compton to carry off the fair Canonbury heiress was very similar to the scheme employed by the poet to smuggle Sir John Falstaff out of the house of Mistress Ford.

In the guise of a baker's boy, Lord William appeared in the highways of Islington and made his way to Canonbury House with a large bread basket. He gained admittance to the house, and to the presence of his lady love ; for in this affair affecting the vital interests of both, he proved himself a man of resource, while Elizabeth was a girl of spirit. In short, the young Warwickshire blood did what would be looked upon to-day as a very sensational thing. He carried the fair Islingtonian out of Canonbury House in his bread basket, and no one any the wiser ! The lovers made haste to get “fast married,” and thus, in a most romantic way, united the house of Spencer of Islington with that of Compton, of Compton Wynnates, Warwickshire, an ancient and loyal family.

But the romance of the lovers did not end with their marriage. Sir John was mad with indignation at the trick that had been played upon him ; his resentment against his daughter for her unfilial conduct, and against Lord William for encouraging her to rebel, waxed hotter and stronger as the months sped by. To

the merry Islingtonians, Sir John now appeared in the light of a graceless curmudgeon ; for they, with their free and airy notions of love, which the literature of the time created and fostered, vowed that Elizabeth Spencer was a proper girl of spirit not to be forced into a marriage against her will with some crusty old money-grubber. We may be sure that in the smoking taverns and tap-rooms of Islington, and in the bar of the " Old Pied Bull "—fit appellation for an inn in such a bovine village—the action of the Canonbury heiress was lauded to the roofs by that gallant band of playwrights and poets that assembled there, to found a literature which never was, and possibly never will be, equalled. Why may not Ben Jonson have had Elizabeth Spencer in his mind's eye when he wrote that exquisite gem :

" Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine ;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not look for wine ? "

Sir John, however, was proof to all such admiration of romance as this, and continued in obdurate estrangement from his daughter and her husband for the best part of a year. At this point in the drama of Canonbury House, Queen Elizabeth comes upon the scene, and her entry certainly discloses one of the prettiest pictures of domestic life, sympathy and emotion that the eyes of man could see, or his brain create. She sent a special message to Sir John Spencer to attend upon her, " with all due speed," at her palace at Greenwich. Thither the knight went in obedience to the Royal mandate, wondering doubtless what his royal mistress was so anxious to see him about.

His wonderment must have been visibly increased when the Queen, with the smiles and hesitations inseparable to so delicate a task, informed Sir John that she wished him to stand sponsor with her to the first-born of a young couple who were estranged from their father. It is perfectly certain that his own estrangement from his daughter Elizabeth and her husband must have flashed upon his mind. The thought must have been daggers to him, and it had the effect of intensifying his anger towards the luckless pair ; for not only did the worthy Islington magnate consent to the Queen's proposal, but promised to adopt the child as his own. Still greater surprises were in store for Sir John, for at the baptism, which was conducted in Her Majesty's private

chapel, the Queen gave the name of "Spencer" to the boy ; this so affected the worthy knight that he, still smarting under the disobedience of his daughter, at once proposed to make the child his sole heir ; and the more effectually to punish his own child, and in order that he might not repent of his proposal, asked the Queen to accept his estates in trust for the infant, which he promised to settle irrevocably by deed.

The sequel to this charming story of real life is soon told. The child to which Sir John Spencer had just stood sponsor, and to which he was about to bequeath the whole of his princely estates, was his own grandchild, the son of his spirited daughter and resourceful son-in-law, who had won the sympathies of their queen for their forlorn and sorrowful condition. And this pretty *dénouement* to the "stirring domestic drama" of Merrie Islington was the Queen's doings. It was the Queen who arranged the scene ; it was the Queen who summoned Sir John to Greenwich ; it was the Queen who secreted the fair Elizabeth and Lord William Compton in an adjoining chamber ; it was the Queen who gave the name of "Spencer" to the child ; it was the Queen who bade the young couple come forth, and begged forgiveness for them from their father ; it was the Queen who reconciled father to children, and in re-uniting a now happy family—once estranged—made herself happy in the work. What marvel that Sir John was choked with emotion when thanking the good Queen for bringing about so desirable an event ?

It is said that "truth is stranger than fiction ;" is it not prettier also ? Where in all the books that were ever written can be found a prettier tale than this of the fair Islington lass, who saw a divided duty between her father and her lover, as Desdemona did, who was banished from the heart of her father to be brought back again by the intervention of a sympathetic Queen ? Surely the imagination of the novelist never depicted aught so affecting as this little tale of the emotions, which on account of its being real is all the more delightful ; and though Islington is now merged with the "monster London," those who look upon that picturesque pile, Canonbury Tower, which, with its mulberry garden, stands to this day—linking to-day with the days of three hundred years ago—should not fail to remember that pathetic romance of the affections which took place in connection with Canonbury House ; the results of which knit merry Islington so

closely to Shakespearean Warwickshire; the Spencers to the Comptons, and both families to Queen Elizabeth.

When the Canonbury heiress blossomed into "the literary lady," and thus maintained the literary repute of Islington, which had been created by that extraordinary company of poets and dramatists, some of whose names I have already mentioned, it was seen that, although so gentle and lovely, she had a sweet will of her own; and when she came into the enormous wealth of her father, she wrote her husband a letter, which for style, point and business-like ability, as well as for the picture it gives of the customs, fashions, whims, fads and fancies of the Elizabethan age, deserves to permanently rank very highly as a specimen of the feminine literature of that glorious literary hierarchy. As emanating directly from literary Islington—from a veritable Islington lass—this literary letter ought to obtain a sacred place in the parochial archives of "the village hard by London."

It is said that Lord William Compton's brain had been turned by the prospect of so much wealth; whether this was so or not cannot be satisfactorily determined; but no doubt the following scrap of literature from the hand of the fair Elizabeth Compton, *née* Spencer, had the effect of bringing his lordship to his senses:

"MY SWEET LIFE,—Now I have declared to you my mind for the settling of your estate, I suppose that it were best for me to bethink and consider within myself what allowance were meetest for me.

"I pray and beseech you to grant to me, your most kind and loving wife, the sum of £2,600 quarterly to be paid. Also I would, beside that allowance, have £600 quarterly to be paid for the performance of charitable works; and those things I would not, neither will be, accountable for. Also, I will have three horses for my own saddle, that none shall dare to lend or borrow; none lend but I, none borrow but you. Also, I would have two gentlewomen, lest one should be sick or have some other let. Also, believe it, it is an indecent thing for a gentlewoman to stand mumping alone, when God hath blessed their lord and lady with a great estate. Also, when I ride a-hunting or a-hawking, or travel from one house to another, I will have them attending; so for either of the said women I must and will have for either of them a horse.

“Also, I will have six or eight gentlemen. And I will have my two coaches, one lined with velvet to myself, with four very fair horses; and a coach for my women lined with cloth and laced with gold, or, otherwise, with scarlet and laced with silver, with four good horses. Also, I will have two coachmen; one for my own coach, the other for my women. Also, at any time when I travel I will be allowed not only caroches and spare horses, for me and my women, but I will have such carriages as be fitting for all, orderly, not pestering my things with my women’s, nor theirs with either chambermaid’s, nor theirs with washmaids’. Also for laundresses, when I travel, I will have them sent away before with the carriages to see all safe. And the chambermaids I will have go before, that the chamber may be ready, sweet, and clean. Also, that it is indecent for me to crowd up myself with my gentleman usher in my coach; I will have him to have a convenient horse to attend me, either in city or country. And I must have two footmen. And my desire is that you defray all the charges for me.

“And for myself, beside my yearly allowance, I would have twenty gowns of apparel; six of them excellent good ones, eight of them for the country, and six other of them very excellent good ones. Also, I would have to put in my purse, £2,000 and £200, and so you to pay my debts. Also, I would have £6,000 to buy me jewels, and £4,000 to buy me a pearl chain.

“Now, seeing I have been and am so reasonable unto you, I pray you do find my children apparel and their schooling, and all my servants, men and women, their wages. Also, I will have all my houses furnished, and my lodging chambers to be suited with all such furniture as is fit; as stools, beds, chairs, suitable cushions, carpets, silver warming-pans, cupboards of plate, fair hangings and such like. So for my drawing chambers in all houses, I will have them delicately furnished, both with hangings, couch, canopy, glass, carpet, chairs, cushions, and all things thereunto belonging. Also, my desire is that you would pay your debts, build up Ashby House, and purchase lands; lend no money, as you love God, to my Lord Chamberlain, who would have all, perhaps your life, from you.

“So now that I have declared to you what I would have, and what it is that I would not have, I pray you, when you be an earl, to allow me £2,000 more than I now desire, and double attendance.”

As a picture of "the good old times," and of the upper-class life in Merrie Islington and "Leafy Warwickshire," in the days of Queen Elizabeth, this missive written by Elizabeth Spencer, afterwards Compton, of Canonbury House, is highly interesting and also diverting. It gives quite a character to the neighbourhood: it also reflects with much truth the indignity that Elizabeth suffered when shut up in Canonbury Tower. Remembering this it is no wonder that she should regard it as "an indecent thing for a gentlewoman to stand mumping alone;" her opinion would certainly be applauded by the fair Islingtonians of to-day, who are found, not only to want the society of two "gentlewomen," but a whole club-house full of them, where they can write in company, and give to the people of three centuries hence specimens of literature—some of it the literature of Islington—which, from a feminine point of view, will not materially differ from that written three centuries ago by the fair and accomplished heiress of Canonbury.

After the removal of Lady Compton to Compton Wynnates—"Compton-in-the-Hole" as it is locally called—Warwickshire, and the death of Sir John Spencer, romance also made haste to quit the ancient walls of Canonbury House, which picturesque and hoary pile must always be associated with the name of Spencer; for when Sir John purchased the property and came into occupation, he caused considerable alterations to be made in the old mansion, making it one of the finest pieces of architecture of those times. As I shall endeavour to show presently, it is clothed in garments of religion, of romance, and of literature. It was originally built in 1362 for the priors of St. Bartholomew, so that in the first and second centuries of its life there was a literary as well as a religious glamour clinging round it, inasmuch as the old monks, besides being men of God, were also men with a taste for recording the story of the times in which they lived, writing it in that curious hand called "black letter," which Charles Lamb so unceremoniously anathematised. In the third century of its existence it was, as I have shown, the scene of a perfectly touching romance; and in the fourth century of its career it was very closely connected with some of the best literature of those times.

In the early part of the present century this once splendid dwelling, redolent of the memories of jolly old monks and friars, of merchant princes, obstinate ~~characters~~ and enterprising lovers

was divided into several houses ; the most prominent part of the house remains, with a tower of brick about seventeen feet square and sixty feet high, from the top of which can be gained one of the finest panoramic views of "the monster London."

The Islington of 1763 may have been greatly changed from the Merrie Islington of 1599, but even so late as that era it was much consorted to by men of letters. It is said that Goldsmith was driven to apartments in Canonbury House by reason of the pressure of his creditors, and such may possibly have been the case ; for it is ascertained beyond all doubt that the graceful author, of whom Dr. Johnson wrote, "whether we take him as a poet, as a comic writer, or as an historian, he stands in the first class," was frequently in the greatest financial difficulties ; whether this was so or not does not so much matter as the knowledge that "poor Goldy," a short thick-set man, with features large and coarse, and face much marked with the small-pox, was for at least a year, if not longer, a resident of Islington.

About the actions of men whose works have rendered them famous there is always some mixture of doubt, and the case of Oliver Goldsmith is no exception to this rule ; there are so many authorities, and each one lays down a different dogma for implicit acceptance. One authority gives a most interesting piece of information to the effect that during his sojourn in Canonbury House, Goldsmith wrote that most charming of all novels, "The Vicar of Wakefield," writing against time, under pressure of debt. It would, I imagine, be very pleasant to Islingtonians of to-day to know and be certain that such a classic as "The Vicar" was written at their own doors, so to speak ; but the probabilities are decidedly against the theory that "The Vicar of Wakefield" was written at Islington ; and for the reason that Goldsmith did not become a resident at Canonbury House till the spring of 1763, and Dr. Johnson had sold the MS. of the novel for sixty pounds to Newberry, the publisher, quite three years before that time. The place where "The Vicar of Wakefield" is most likely to have been written was at Goldsmith's lodgings in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, where the poet's landlady, much to his irritation and disgust, caused him to be arrested for arrears of rent, from which unpleasant position he was timely released by his friend and helper, the great lexico-

But though Canonbury House cannot claim to have been the birth-place of "The Vicar," Goldsmith is understood to have done some excellent work there ; and here again is a division of opinion almost as wide as a church door, for one biographer asserts that poor Goldy fled from "the monster London" in 1763 to the inner shades of romantic Canonbury, at Islington, while another writer equally as dogmatic lays it down that Goldsmith did not take lodgings in the turret of Canonbury House till the year 1767—four years later. He had, says the latter of these writers, migrated to the "merry suburb" of London so early as 1762, and took up his abode "with a Mrs. Elizabeth Fleming, to whom he paid £50 a year for board and lodging;" so that if this be true the other statement must be wrong.

For myself, I am inclined to think that Goldsmith must have known Merrie Islington well, some years before his asserted appearance there in 1762, inasmuch as he lays the scene of his "Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog," which is written in the body of the novel "The Vicar of Wakefield," in Islington ; indeed the good man whom he there describes might have been limned from himself, so much is it like him for humour :

" In Islington there was a man,
Of whom the world might say,
That still a godly race he ran,
Whene'er he went to pray.

" A kind and gentle heart he had,
To comfort friends and foes ;
The naked every day he clad,
When he put on his clothes,"

and as "The Vicar" was sold to Newberry in 1759, though not published by him till after the success of "The Traveller," in 1767, I think it is clear that Goldsmith, if he did not actually reside at Islington previous to the year 1759, was a frequent visitor there, knowing the place and some of its inhabitants.

During his residence at Canonbury House, where we may safely assume he was visited by those eminent and flourishing friends of his, Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick and Samuel Johnson, the poet is accredited with having accomplished much of his best, but not most popular work. In the

monk-haunted lodgings there Goldsmith is said to have revised his "Art of Poetry," to have written the "Life of Beau Nash"—though here once more opinion differs and assigns the birth-place of the "Life" to some dismal quarters on the edge of Fleet Ditch, at a spot still remembered by old Londoners as having been called "Break-neck Stairs"—and "Letters on English History from a Nobleman to his Son," together with his "Survey of Experimental Philosophy." All this time it is certain that Goldsmith was very poor, for "The Vicar of Wakefield" had not been published to take the town by storm with its charmingly-drawn characters and gracefully-painted scenes; and in the bitterness of his poverty we can quite believe that when the poet "dropped into verse," and began his "Description of an Author's Bedchamber," he was actually relating his own experiences at Canonbury House and other lodgings where he was forced to take shelter.

"There, in a lonely room from bailiffs snug,
 The Muse found Scroggen stretched beneath a rug;
 A window patched with paper, lent a ray,
 That dimly showed the state in which he lay.
 The morn was cold, he views with keen desire
 The rusty grate unconscious of a fire;
 With beer and milk arrears the frieze was scored,
 And five cracked tea-cups dressed the chimney-board;
 A night-cap decked his brows instead of bay,
 A cap by night—a stocking all the day!"

Poor Goldy! his was a stormy career, but though he was by nature thoughtless, thriftless, extravagant and utterly imprudent, he was also by nature loving, generous, sympathetic and wondrously endowed with the literary gift. His connection with Merrie Islington, the resort of most of the authors of his own and previous times, adds a sum of literary history to that once famous parish which ought to be zealously treasured by the inhabitants; and whether Goldsmith stayed at Mrs. Fleming's or at Canonbury House at this date or that, is not of so much leading interest as the fact that the immortal poet, playwright and historian did really reside at both places at some uncertain dates, and has thus left behind him a page of lore for which Literary Islington ought to be grateful.

And "the gentle Elia," too, the sweet prose poet, the delicate analyser of human emotions, surely Merrie Islington has a strong

claim to the title of "Literary" when it numbers such a prince of the pen as he among its frequenters. It must no doubt have been when on a visit to the "merry village adjacent to London and a fashionable resort for its citizens," that Charles Lamb wrote those bitter lines:

"Who first invented work and bound the free
And holiday-rejoicing spirit down?"

He had for once escaped from

"That dry drudgery at the desk's dead wood,"

to the "holiday-rejoicing" band at Islington, and that had made him moralize upon his toil at his "desk's dead wood," as he quaintly puts it, in the city; for at the time of his visit there, the frolics and junkettings, for which the village had been noted centuries before, were still alive, though possibly not conducted with so robust a spirit. In these there is no doubt Charles Lamb took a quiet delight, for the distinguished critic and essayist was invariably in love with those rustic pleasures which brought the villagers together and turned each frump and curmudgeon of fifty into sprightly creatures of twenty-five.

Charles Lamb, during his sojourn at Islington, resided in a house on the border of the New River. There he was doubtless visited by his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the opium eater, and the celebrated author of "The Ancient Mariner," for Coleridge and Lamb were inseparable companions, and this adds a new interest to the little village, increasing its literary influence down to the early years of the present century. "The gentle Elia," who, in the words of another poet, Tommy Moore (who it is very likely was also a frequenter of Merrie Islington),

"Drew after him the hearts of many,"

quitted the stage of life at Edmonton, on December 27th, 1834. His name should be recorded in a fair place among the galaxy of modern writers of eminence who fled from the roar of city life to the then quieter village-like scenes of Literary Islington.

Long before Goldsmith took up his residence in Canonbury House, as poetized in the lines of Fox,

"There the sweet bard of Auburn sat and tuned,
The plaintive moanings of his village dirge,"

there lived in that old shady pile a literary man who burned the

midnight oil and spent many a laborious hour in the production of a work which has been of invaluable service to succeeding generations. The accomplishment of a dictionary is, we know, upon the authority of Dr. Johnson, a labour of engrossing difficulty ; it is, in the words recently uttered by a well-known English bishop, a "perfect debauch of drudgery," and this Dr. Johnson found, for he thanked God when the last volume of his dictionary was handed over to the publisher ; what then can be said of the compilation of the first English Encyclopædia ?

In the dim rooms of Canonbury Tower did the exquisitely painstaking Ephraim Chambers continue the production of his voluminous work, the first of its kind ever accomplished. The author chose a happy and tranquil spot in which to conduct his colossal compilation. So severe and learned a gentleman we may be sure was not attracted to merry Islington on account of the frolics and merrymakings there, but rather owing to the serenity of the village, which he visited previous to the year 1740, and which doubtless, at that time, was more countrified and quiet than at a later period.

In spite of its character as a "merrie" village, I think Islington must also, in the latter part of the last century and the beginning of this, have possessed those qualifications necessary for a place of sojourn for invalids and others, in so delicate a state of health as to be unable to bear the wear and tear of a city life. As I have endeavoured to show in the first part of this article, the poet Cowley, he who wrote that living line :

" God the first garden made, and the first city Cain,"

adjourned to Islington for the benefit of his health, which was extremely delicate, and thus I suppose it was that caused the friends of another poet, William Collins, to carry their charge to the pleasant scenes and quietude of Islington. But there was a melancholy interest attached to the advent of Collins in this merrie village "hard by London ;" the poor poet had lost his reason, and doubtless his friends and medical advisers thought that a change from his former life of disease and misery to the beauties and quiet charms of Islington would cure him of his madness.

Poor Collins ! there were elements of tragedy in his career ; he only lived to the age of thirty-six, and the greater part of that

time had been passed in fighting for life—literary life, and when fate changed his biting poverty and eating care into fortune, ease and fame, the poet must needs go off his head. A strain of melancholy runs through his poetry, as will be seen from the following short extract, which might as well have been written at Islington, where he was confined, as on the verdant slopes of Sussex, where he was born and spent his childhood :

“ By fairy hands their knell is rung ;
 By forms unseen their dirge is sung ;
 There Honour comes, a pilgrim gray,
 To bless the turf that wraps their clay ;
 And Freedom shall awhile repair,
 To dwell a weeping hermit there.”

During his residence at Islington, Collins was not forgotten by those many friends who had known him in poverty and appreciated his splendid poetic talents. That large-hearted man, Dr. Johnson, who rescued Goldsmith from distress, was not likely to see a brother poet languishing in solitude and in mental darkness. He visited Collins at Islington and comforted the mad poet as much as he could ; and thus, owing to his undoubted visits to Goldsmith at Canonbury House, and other literary friends in the village, Islington may regard Dr. Johnson, if not in the light of a resident, at least as a very eminent connection, perhaps the most eminent.

If most of its literary characters have been importations, which they undoubtedly have been, Islington can boast of at least one native, if no more, who attained to great literary eminence. This was the antiquarian John Nichols, who was for nearly fifty years the editor of that pioneer of monthlies, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and who, by reason of his position, consorted with most of the leading antiquaries and literary men of his time. This “Sylvanus Urban,” who did much to illustrate the topography and literary history of the county in which he was born, dated his nativity from a house adjoining the “King's Head,” Islington, in 1745. Nichols was a pure Islingtonian ; he was born in the village and he died there in 1826, being buried in the churchyard opposite his birthplace. It should also be noted that Ephraim Chambers, of whom I have already treated, worn out with the tedious work of his Encyclopædia, died in Canonbury House in 1740.

These are a few of the great writers of the past who have, by their presence at Islington, given this parish a literary value, which few other parishes in the immediate neighbourhood of London can boast of. In writing these articles I have chosen those among literary men who were the most eminent of their time, to treat of as sojourners at "Merrie Islington," and have omitted those who, though of lesser rank, have in combination with the others shed an imperishable light upon this erstwhile village "hard by London." The known literary men who have been traced as visitors to Islington are a very large number indeed, and doubtless those who have not been identified as having a connection with the parish are fully as large; therefore I think that the title of "Literary Islington" is not ill-bestowed upon a village which in the past has been the domicile of so many of the creators of the English literature of which this country is so rightly and justly proud; a village now developed into part of a city, which for literary production, in the past and present, has had no rival in the wide world.

What the Moon saw in India (at Christmas).

I.

IT saw us start on a picnic—one of those entertainments of which a certain class of the community have a holy horror. "You never know what people do," they say, as if one wanted to know. No, thank goodness! no one knows what people do on those occasions, except the moon.

Some of us sang, and most of us thought we did, and made painful exhibitions of ourselves, as we sat in the stern of the two large boats, lashed side by side. Mrs. Anderson, the Deputy Commissioner's wife, said that Mrs. Delamaine never knew when to stop, if she once began, and, by way of a gentle hint, she rustled over to the other boat and sang to herself. *We* all stayed with Mrs. Delamaine. We were not particular about the singing. It was good enough for us. We started at 7 o'clock, just as the moon rose, and we drifted about a good deal, until we had a little quiet by running on a sandbank, and then we said how lovely the moon's reflection on the water was, and how refined and pure and bright her influence was on a wicked world, and then we each took one of the girls to show her how pure and bright it was—and we were very happy, and very hungry, as we leant over the side of the vessel, and wondered if we should ever reach the food.

Then the Christmas moon rose higher in the heavens, and, with much noise and vociferation, we were shoved clear of the sandbank, and we drifted on and on, until even Mrs. Anderson stopped singing, and hoped it would soon be over, and she said that, if we ever got home again, she would make a vow never to go for a moonlight picnic any more; and the swishing of the water alone answered her, and the silence overawed her, so that she wept, but only the moon saw her.

And, by-and-bye, in the late night, we stepped on shore at a burning ghât, and saw white spectres watching for us, with

blazing torches in their hands, and a white cloth hospitably spread upon the steps, and the white spectres trooped down like torch-bearers of the middle ages, and upset the kerosine into our untasted dinner, and made uneatable all that the white ants had left, but we bore it patiently and smiled—it took so little to make us smile.

II.

A LITTLE crib, in a shaded room, with the purdahs down!

Restless hands, and a curly head, that moved from side to side, trying to find a cooler place—and on her knees, by the side of the crib, a pale young woman, with thin hands, and a patient voice. The Christmas moon, looking in through the purdah, caught a little sparkle on her eyelash, like the glitter of a diamond, and made a silver river of light across the yellow curls and the darkness beyond. It was so dark that the pale woman shivered.

“Tell me about Beauty and the Beast,” said the baby voice fretfully.

She laid her head upon the pillow, because it ached, and shut her eyes, and the diamond fell, like a sparkle of light, on to the child’s soft face.

He rubbed it away. “Oh mother, is it raining?” he said.

“No, darling,” she answered softly; “it never rains.”

She longed—ah, with what a passion of longing who can tell? for healthy English seasons—for rest, and the splash of water, and the north wind on a cliff over the sea—and she laid her head closer, closer to the curls upon the pillow, and told the story of Beauty and the Beast in a tired voice.

When one has told a story for fifteen nights running, one is apt to get tired.

The Christmas moon shifted suddenly, and it grew dark. It drifted into another room where the chic (a bamboo curtain) was lifted, and showed greyly in the gloom two figures sitting in the doorway. One was speaking, leaning forward impressively, and emphasizing his words; the other, shrinking back into the shadow, was silent.

“God knows I do not wish to add to your trouble,” the elder man said, “but I must speak the truth. Your wife is breaking down. She is young, and she has not much of a constitution,

and now the boy's long illness and the worry and anxiety—no, it won't do! She *must* go home, or I can't be answerable for her life. Pull yourself together, man, and think it over. Have you no friends to help you? No way of raising a hundred pounds? It is a matter of life and death."

Home! a married subaltern in an infantry regiment! To him too came the scent of English earth—the echo of Christmas chimes in an old grey church—a passionate sense of hopelessness. A "matter of life and death!" Who mocked him with those terrible words?

"It's no use, doctor," he said hoarsely; "it can't be undone now. I hardly know if I wish it could. For life or death we must bear it together."

"Together!" the word floated out into the moonlight almost like an echo. Was there anguish in it, or despair, or pain? or was there something, too, of happiness?

III.

THERE was a suspicion of chill rain as Christmas Eve passed at midnight into Christmas Day, and the moon shone fitfully through the wet peepul leaves. A clamorous group was huddling round the well in the Commissioner Sahib's compound, and there was a sound of water, and the shrill hubbub of voices, and a bhisti standing on the step was letting down his bucket slowly, with something heavy in it. The chowkidar, sitting wrapped in a sheet on the step of the well, gave forth an inharmonious shout at intervals, raising his head like some grotesque bird of prey, for the mem-sahib always woke up if he ceased to shout, and the very stars would falter in their course if the mem-sahib woke through any fault of his. The voice ceased and everything grew very still, as the bhisti pulled on his rope, and one by one the silent men rose and held it too: slowly, slowly it came up, with the drip of water falling from it, and a faint voice following it up into the clear moonlight, with something white across it that they clutched at eagerly, and laid out stiff and straight in the moonlight on the steps. Then they let down the rope again, and a man scrambled up, clinging to it, and, when he touched the ground, he lay where he had fallen, with his head on the woman's cold breast and his dishevelled hair hiding her face.

"Get up, Suntoo, poor man," they said to him hurriedly in

whispers. "Take her away ; it is the will of God ! If she remains here the sahib will be angry, and the water will be accursed."

* * * * *

"Why do you cry, ayah?" the children said next morning. "Mother, make ayah tell us why she cries."

"Ah, mem-sahib"—she folded her soft old hands together and hid her face in her chuddar—"my daughter died last night ; that is why I cry. The boy died of fever a month ago—a whole long month ago—but she could not forget him, she had a gentle heart."

"How did she die?"

"She died of *love*, defender of the poor, and Suntoo has come back from the burying."

"Poor ayah! How does one die of love?" the children asked.

* * * * *

"We had a death in our compound last night," the mem-sahib said to her Christmas guests ; "it quite upset me, and it has spoiled Christmas Day altogether."

"Ah, poor ayah!" said the children.

"Yes, it gave me quite a shock," said the mem-sahib. "Ayah told the story so dramatically, but it was only the sweeper's wife."

"And how did she die?"

"Of fever, I suppose, they all die of fever. *Love*, the ayah called it."

But moon shining outside, there Suntoo lay upon the ground, knew the truth.

IV.

SHE made a point of rising as slowly as she could over the Government gardens, and sending only little shafts of light, like spies, into the deep green shadows of the trees, for against the glimmer of the sandy walks, she had caught sight of a white skirt, and of something dark that moved beside it.

It was all so indistinct that one could not swear to anything except the voices, and they floated softly and indistinctly too out into the open moonlight.

He. "Then you are brave enough to face the world, and—and—your mother for my sake?"

She. "Yes, darling, if we love each other, what does anything else signify?"

He. "Of course, my pay is very small as yet, but in India, you know, it rises immensely as one goes on, and on the staff, or when one is commanding a regiment, it is simply enormous."

She. "And will you be commanding a regiment soon, darling?"

He. "Oh yes, in a few years; you see, I have three years' service now, and time passes so quickly—*beastly* quickly, sometimes, you know, dear."

She. "Yes, darling."

A pause and an interruption, then the white dress swept on anew.

The soft young voice spoke again :

"I am afraid your mother does not like me, Madeleine?"

"Oh, darling, she does not *know* you; she is prejudiced! Never mind." Something black lay for a minute against something white, but the moon could not swear as to what it was. "If we *love* each other, we can bear any amount of persecution."

"Then you will be true to me through everything?"

"How can you doubt me, darling—even if mother is cross?"

"She thinks so much of money," with a sigh.

"As if we could not live on bread and cheese, or vegetables, or anything—even a *tent*, darling, would be *Heaven*."

Again a pause, whilst the moon slipped behind a cloud. She is an unwearied and patient chaperon, but, just then, she would not have spied upon them for the world.

V.

A LITTLE bungalow, with a little neglected garden. On the verandah a bearer dozing with a lantern in his hand. A young man in mess dress, sitting upon the bed, with his hands clenched upon his knee.

A handsome young man with close-cropped hair, that still had the suspicion of a curl—with dark eyes, looking blankly out just now into a dark future—a haggard and despairing face, with set lips, from which the quick responsive smile had faded.

Before him, on the table, there was a litter of papers—little

scraps, with figures noted down in pencil ; some ball programmes—a few faded flowers, and a photograph that lay face downwards. He stretched out his hand presently, and took up the pencil with a pensive air, jotting down more figures until the paper was full. Then he tore it across impatiently. Once or twice he seemed on the point of lifting up the photograph, and, when at last he did, he thrust it into his desk with the face still hidden, and locked it in.

A woman's face, of course. Young? beautiful? no—but much beloved—his mother's.

There was a letter on the bed beside him addressed to her, that began "Dearest." He opened it again, read it through, and then resealed it carefully. He pulled up his waste-paper basket and shuffled in all the papers carelessly, pressing them down with his foot. Then he drew up his chair to the table, took a rupee from his pocket and sat with it in his hand, staring at it. It seemed to fascinate him. His face grew agonized in its intentness, as he leant over it. A shaft of moonlight touched it, and played about it, as, with a sudden movement, he tossed it in the air and it fell ringing on the table.

The bearer woke with a start, and the lantern fell, deluging him with oil. He rose furtively to his feet, and stumbled into the bottle-khana, looking into his master's room as he went by. The young man had risen to his feet, and had hidden the silver in his hand. "Good God! *heads!*" he said out loud, as the bearer passed.

"The sahibs are all mad," the bearer said to himself. "They sit at home to win money for themselves."

With a quick, firm step the young man moved over to the corner of the room, and took his gun down from the rack. His face had lightened, and his haggard eyes were keen and bright. He opened it with a swift movement, to put the cartridge in its place, and then he went back and sat upon the bed. He held the muzzle upwards in a peculiar fashion, and he sat perfectly still, with something like the ghost of a smile upon his face.

The bearer, with fresh oil in the lamp, came softly past and looked in. "The sahibs are all mad," he said again to himself. "He is laughing into the muzzle of his gun. The guns of the sahibs are to them as children."

And he went on and sat down upon the steps.

"I can charge the sahib for a new glass," he said, "that will be 10 annas; and another bottle of oil, that will be 2 annas; 2 annas and 10 annas make 12 annas," and he smiled to himself.

And, inside, the sahib was sitting like one mesmerised, with the muzzle of the gun touching his cheek, and his toe against the trigger. Visions were rushing through his mind with tumultuous haste, and knocking importunately at his heart. Visions of a home in England—desolate! Of a hurried funeral in India, and the whispered comments of his friends. Of the colonel writing the news hastily, and sealing the letter with a black seal. And he followed the letter to England, and heard a cry—a real cry, it seemed, amongst the neem trees outside—"Something has happened to Arthur!"

Then his mind flew back to India—to the hush of awe over the station, and the putting away of all his familiar things. Uncertain whispers and surmises—perhaps, here and there, under cover of the darkness. . . . Oh, not a tear—"Poor Daisy! God knows I am not worth it." Men put it more forcibly, more pitilessly, more truthfully. In the ante-room they do not mince matters. "I did not think Mauleverer was a coward," that was what some one said, "Or such a thundering ass," some one else added.

Then again, he saw the little sunny morning-room at home, and the grey-haired lady sitting with the letter on her lap.

"Anything but *this*, Arthur! Sin, sorrow, shame, bring them all to me, my son. What are mothers for, if they cannot share the sorrows of your life? But not death, not death."

He rose so hastily that he forgot his rifle, and it fell rattling to the ground. There was a report like thunder, and he was standing alone in the dark room with the broken desk still lying on the table, and the white plaster from the shattered ceiling falling on his head. "No, I won't be such a ——— coward as that," he said and laughed.

In a minute there was confusion all around him. Subalterns in every variety of strange apparel clamouring in the doorway; the bearer sobbing at his feet, and confessing his crime about the twelve annas. The doctor from the next bungalow feeling him all over for broken bones and internal injuries; the fire picquet clattering down on its way from barracks. Mauleverer himself

was the most composed of all, but his face was extremely white, and he was very silent.

"I was fooling with my gun," he said. "Here, let's get out of this. Hi! some one, whoever is nearest to the bed, tear up that letter, will you? and throw it in the basket. I'm off!"

VI.

It is quite a mistake to say that the moon saw this, for the great point of the story is that she was shut out.

It was a "kala jagah." Do you ever have them in your station, reader? They are very nice places—very often not as black as they are painted—and one meets very nice people there. Very often they are not black either.

Well, this is what they *say*. They say that *he* went in first, and it was very dark, and he saw a white dress in a doorway, and he stumbled after it, and slipped his arm round somebody's waist, and said, "Darling!" I don't *know*—remember this is only what they *say*. And they say that she threw back her head, and turned her face to him and laughed, and she said, "Oh, Jack, how *sweet* of you." And he took his hand away hastily, and said something under his breath. He was not frightened, of course; he was only taken by surprise. One is always surprised when one meets one's own wife in a "kala jagah."

"Dash it all, Mary—*you*," he said, and then he recovered himself, and added, with great dignity, "I am surprised to see you here."

"Are you, dear?" she said. "But it was a pleasant surprise, I hope."

That is the story that is going the round of our station, but people are so apt to exaggerate. It may not be true; but, true or not, it certainly was not one of the things that the moon saw, for even the moon has no admittance to a "kala jagah."

VII.

JUST a woman, with bent head, sitting a little in the shadow, and leaning forward so that the cool breeze touched the hair upon her forehead. Christmas Eve was fading into Christmas Day, and though the scent of roses filled the air about her, and on the verandah the violets were in bloom, her thoughts were in a land where cold white snow reflected the light of the same moon

that touched her here. From the dusty road, a hundred yards away, there came, at intervals, the sound of a harsh, unmelodious song—otherwise it was quite still. She was a woman with a sweet, soft face, that had lost something of the grace of early womanhood, but had gained more than any youth could give her; a deep, calm face, that hid the secrets of a lifetime behind a patient smile. Her hands had dropped upon her lap, over a torn and shabby letter, from which the childish handwriting stared at her. Sometimes the smile faded and came again; sometimes a soft sigh stirred the rose upon her bosom, till at last, softly, on the still air, there came the echo of far-away voices. Some one in the bungalow opposite was bungling over a song—an old air, that the inexperienced fingers could not catch, until they had played it over carefully, picking out the notes one by one. But presently, with a triumphant chord on the jingling piano, a voice broke into music and filled the air with sound:

“God rest you, merry gentlemen.”

Then a pause, and a few more discordant notes; then, “I’ve got it now,” some one said, and a whole chorus of voices broke out again:

“God rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
Remember Christ, our Saviour,
Was born on Christmas Day.”

Remember! Do mothers ever forget? The little crumpled letter slipped to the floor, and lay whitely against the shadows of her dress, her whole nerveless figure became rigid and strained with her intense emotion, her eyes looked out beyond the shadows and the moonlight, and the pointsettia hedge—beyond the lighted bungalow opposite, where the rattling piano was still played by unskilful fingers.

“Oh! for second sight,” she said aloud, “or for some happy place where there are no partings.”

Up the garden path came the jingle of spurs, and the heavy tread of some one who was tired, and walked slowly—some one who came silently in at the verandah door, and stood for one long minute, with his hand upon her shoulder, looking with grave intentness into her eyes.

“Dreaming again, Esther? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

"Ah! yes! but it is Christmas Eve," she said, with a shadowy smile. Surely the star in the east was hardly brighter than the star, that seemed like a point of fire, above the tower of the church.

And, as she looked at it, she seemed to follow its downward rays to the west, and she saw, far away, counting by human limitations of space and time, a dimly-lighted nursery at home, with white beds shaded from the light. Three little beds that held the jewels of her heart. Two curly heads, and one that lay smooth and dark between them, and that turned restlessly as she stood, faintly smiling, by his side. She saw, through the curtained window, a gleam of moonlight, like a river of silver, and, far away, the soft glitter of a star, and something—was it the white radiance of a wing, or only a shadow within the shadows of the room, that rustled softly by her, and stirred the silence into sound?

"Remember!" So sweetly came the word, it almost seemed as if some one spoke. "Do you remember?"

"Do mothers ever forget?" she answered softly.

The little dark head was lifted from the pillow and the sleepy eyes sought every corner of the room.

"Something kissed me," said a little voice. "I thought it was mother, but perhaps I only waked because it was Christmas Day."

An Arch Deceiver.

By A. T. G. PRICE,

Author of "ARCHIE MARVEL'S MODEL," etc.

"MISS HALIFAX, how glad I am to see you back again."

The words themselves were commonplace, but the tone in which Reginald Aston said them brought a flush of pleasure to the girl's face as she let her hand rest for a moment in his warm clasp.

"And I am very pleased to be back where every one is so kind to me," she answered with a little happy laugh, "although I have enjoyed my three months away immensely. Oh, you have come for me, Jenkins?" with a smile to the man-servant, who now advanced.

"Yes, miss; the carriage is here," he replied in a well-trained and impassive manner as he relieved her of her umbrella and bag.

"Then you will let me see you into it, won't you?" said Reginald. "I shall be coming to the Abbey in a few days, so I hope we shall meet again soon," he continued, as he arranged the fur rugs about her; for it was chilly in the evenings, although it was only the early part of September. Miss Halifax gave a smiling little nod, and then the carriage started off, and in a few minutes was lost in the dusk and the rapidly gathering autumn mist.

Reginald Aston stood gazing after it, and the few people at the station, who had listened to all he had been saying to Miss Halifax, looked at him and drew their own conclusions, all of which were very much of the same kind. There was certainly some reason for their interest, for Mr. Aston was the squire of, and owned the greater part of the village of, Everleigh, and as at the age of twenty-nine he was still unmarried, his smallest conversation with an eligible young lady was always noticed and commented on.

But was Stella Halifax eligible? Ordinary fashionable

mothers with daughters would have held up their hands in horror had such a question been asked. For Miss Halifax was a governess, and nothing more or less, though the casual observer, who only saw this more than ordinarily handsome girl, always dressed beautifully and in the best of taste, associating apparently on terms of perfect equality with Sir George and Lady Osmond, might not have guessed that such was the fact.

"For I should never allow my children to be educated and trained by any one but a lady, and I consider that the only difference between our position and Miss Halifax's is a pecuniary one," Lady Osmond had said on her governess's arrival, and all Everleigh had taken their cue from her. So much so, indeed, that even when they saw that something stronger than friendship was beginning to grow up between Stella and Mr. Aston, the "best match" in the neighbourhood, they all considered it the most natural thing in the world.

In the meanwhile the pair of horses quickly got over the two miles, and in little more than ten minutes Stella Halifax was standing in front of the blazing wood fire in the great hall at Everleigh Abbey.

"Mamma was so sorry not to be here when you came back," said May Osmond, after she and her sister had almost smothered Stella with their embraces. "But they were going to dine at the Thorntons', and you know what a long drive that is. Have you enjoyed your holiday, and were your 'unknown' uncle and aunt nice? We were so afraid they were going to keep you always."

"Yes, I've had a delightful time," answered Miss Halifax. "But I'm very pleased to be back here. What's been happening while I've been away?"

"Oh, nothing much. Mr. Aston isn't engaged to any one—yet." This from Maud Osmond, who was fifteen, and who fancied that she could see quite as much, if not more, than her elders.

Stella stooped down to pick up her cloak. "I'm going to take off my things now," she said, and as she ran upstairs, she tried to persuade herself that all the happiness she felt was occasioned by her returning to her pupils, and to what for the last two years had been her home.

"Oh, there's one little piece of news I've always forgotten to

tell you," said Lady Osmond the next morning, as they all stood in the hall ready to start for service, for it was Sunday. "We've got a new curate."

"How delightful," answered Stella. "But you might have told me before, as you know how I adore curates."

This sally caused a ripple of mirth, as Miss Halifax's dislike for the species was well known.

"But this is not an ordinary curate," said Sir George with pretended dignity. "He is the Reverend and Honourable William Ashford, his father being the Earl of Dulchester."

Stella dropped her prayer-book and the shilling she had just borrowed of Lady Osmond for the offertory, and she took some time in picking them up.

"She's struck all of a heap by it," said Tom Osmond, whose last Sunday of the holidays this was. "She wishes now she hadn't said such things about curates. How much will you give me, Miss Halifax, not to tell him?"

But Stella did not seem to notice what he was saying.

"And he's quite different from other curates," continued Sir George. "He acts beautifully. He took the part of the villain at the Mowbrays' theatricals at the last moment, because some one failed, and he made quite the hit of the piece."

"I shall look forward to seeing him," murmured Miss Halifax, whose head was bent down over her gloves, which she seemed to find some difficulty in buttoning.

Maud looked at her curiously. "Have you ever seen him, Miss Halifax?" she asked.

Stella started and raised her head. "Yes, I have seen him act," she answered. "It was years ago."

"Well, we shall be late if we don't start now," said Lady Osmond, who had been rather surprised at the effect the curate's name had had on her governess. But had she been seated in church where she could have had a better view of Stella's face, and had not Miss Halifax been wearing a thick veil, she would have been still more astonished. For when, after the faint chanting of the prayer had been wafted from the vestry and the tones of the organ had begun to swell through the church, the choir streamed noiselessly into the chancel, Stella had looked up, and as her gaze had fallen on the last white-clad figure, it had seemed to her almost as though her heart stood still and a

deadly feeling of faintness had crept over her. How the next half-hour passed she hardly knew. She stood up and sat down mechanically, but it was not till the sermon, which was a beautiful piece of elocution if nothing more, that she dared to look up, and though she only did so once the preacher's eye happened to meet hers and she was horrified to see that he recognized her.

"Will you wait for me a minute?" said Lady Osmond, after the service was over. "I want to ask Mr. Ashford to lunch. He has to take the service this afternoon, and he lives such a long way off."

Stella looked round desperately for an excuse to get home. She felt that it was impossible to meet him before all these people. However, unexpected relief came from Maud, who remarked with a knowing smile, "You can ask him, mamma, but I don't think you'll get him. He's talking to Melinda Hamley, and whenever the Hamleys wait for him it always means that they're going to ask him to lunch."

"Yes, don't spoil sport, Lucy," said Sir George.

"Here's Mr. Aston; why don't you ask him?" continued Maud artlessly. "He must find it so lonely living all by himself."

And as Reginald Aston happened to come up at that moment he was asked, and having accepted, he walked home with them, being manœuvred to Stella's side by the wily Maud. But the way Miss Halifax received his remarks, and her manner to him during lunch, immediately after which she excused herself and went to her own room, filled him with surprise. What, he asked himself, had changed the bright, happy girl of yesterday, whose eyes had looked into his with such a friendly gaze, and who had seemed so glad to see him, into this cold, indifferent woman, who had listened to his remarks almost without looking at him, and answered them courteously, but with the fewest possible words? It was absolutely inexplicable, he was obliged to own to himself at last when, having escaped from the Osmonds' merry family party, he strode through the park to his own house. All the afternoon Stella lay on a sofa in front of her window trying to think of what she ought to do, but no plan suggested itself to her. He was here, and was as good as engaged to Miss Hamley; so she had gathered from every one's remarks. But now that he

had seen her what would he do? Would she have to leave her present home and start anew? Her heart sank as she remembered the difficulties of two years ago. And then the image of Reginald Aston rose before her, and the tears came into her eyes as she thought of the cruel awakening from that short-lived dream. But what should she do now? Which should make the first move? This was the question that she puzzled over all the afternoon, and when the gong sounded for tea it was still unanswered. At any rate she must not let Lady Osmond see that there was anything wrong; so, having bathed her face in cold water, she went downstairs, and in answer to Lady Osmond's anxious inquiries she said that she had had a headache, but that she was better now, and would be quite able to go to church.

"We shall only have Mr. Martin this evening," said Sir George.

"Oh, yes; what did you think of Mr. Ashford?" asked Lady Osmond.

"Did you recognize him?" inquired Maud.

"Oh, I hardly looked at him," answered Stella, trying to speak lightly. "I was feeling so tired all through the service. I daresay the long journey yesterday knocked me up. I should have done better to have taken your advice and stayed at home."

There was no moon, so it was quite dark that evening when they got out of church, and as she passed through the gate Miss Halifax suddenly felt a note thrust into her hand. She could see no one, but she guessed from whom it was; but even though she had no doubt on the matter, the sight of the familiar writing gave her an unpleasant shock when at length she had locked herself into her room that night.

"Be on the path above the mill on Tuesday at six in the evening," it ran. "It is absolutely necessary that we should come to an agreement. You need not send an answer, as I know you will come." So on Tuesday she was there. She would have to see him sooner or later, so why not now? she said to herself, as she paced up and down the path. He had chosen the place well. On one side, though hidden by some bushes, ran the river, while on the other was a row of trees and then a stretch of marshy ground, so that unless any one came along the pathway, which was a private one, there was no chance of their being seen. In a very few minutes a black figure came in sight. She kept her

back to it as long as she could, and it was only when she heard her name spoken that she turned round.

"Well!" she said.

The curate took off his hat and bowed politely. "This is a nice way for a wife to greet her husband."

"I thought you were dead."

"That's precisely what I wished you to think. I put it in all the papers. It cost me any amount of money."

"But why did you?" she asked.

"Because I am dead," he answered emphatically, looking steadily at her. "Julian Morton is dead, and he had better remain so. Unless, of course, you wish to claim him as your husband."

She shrank away from him. "I would rather die first," she said.

"Very well, then; the matter is in your own hands," he continued airily. "As long as you don't meddle with me I shan't interfere with you. When we are agreed on that point there is no need for us to have anything further to do with one another."

"But how did you come here, and where is William Ashford?" she asked.

"Well, if you like, I will tell you the whole of the matter," he answered. "Let's sit down on this log. You keep an eye on that direction, and I'll watch the other path, so that if any one comes we needn't be seen together. Where shall I begin? On that day when I returned from the rehearsal and found you gone? You can't imagine what my feelings were."

"Go on," she interrupted coldly.

"Well, you remember that some little while before William Ashford had joined the company at the Comedy Theatre. I forget what name he went by, but I believe we were the only people who knew who he really was. I used to ask him in to see us."

"And you used to play cards with him. Yes, I remember."

"And I daresay you remember how extraordinarily he resembled me. People often used to take us for one another."

"Yes, I once made the mistake myself."

"And kissed him by accident, perhaps. Well, as I am dead I suppose I can't be jealous, so we won't say anything more about it. After you left he and I shared lodgings, and, at first for

amusement, I used to get myself up and dress as much like him as possible, till at last no one at the theatre knew which was which. In a few months we went on tour, and, to cut the matter short, when we were in the north there was an accident, and one of us was killed. It was then that the idea flashed across me, and I let every one think that it was Julian Morton who was dead. I put notices into all the papers, and soon afterwards left the company and went to America. There I stopped for some while to study my part. Of course I took all William Ashford's things with me, and on looking through his papers I discovered that he was a clergyman. Then I wrote to my noble father in England, and in a very short while I received an answer asking me to come home as soon as possible, and saying that all would be forgiven. I stayed a few more weeks in America, and made myself thoroughly master of all William Ashford's papers, filling in the time with theological study, and then I went home. I was received with open arms, neither my father nor mother nor brother having the slightest suspicion, and I can congratulate myself that I played the part to perfection. One thing my noble father seemed specially to wish was that I should continue in the Church, and, as I raised no objections, and the bishop, to please my father, was willing to wink at my misdeeds, here I am. Now do you see any reason why we should disturb the past?"

Stella considered for a moment. "But what about Miss Hamley?" she asked slowly.

He changed colour slightly.

"Oh, yes, I hadn't mentioned her. We've been engaged for some time."

"But you can't marry her."

"Why not? My dear Stella, I wish you would remember that Julian Morton is dead."

She did not answer him for a few moments, but she sat trying to think what she ought to do. At last she spoke.

"This is my decision," she said. "I suppose it's very wicked of me to let the deception go on, but I will do so on condition that you leave me alone—and that you remain unmarried."

"And if I refuse to promise?"

"Then I will let all the world know the truth."

He seized her by the arm and leant towards her.

"Then in that case I should claim you as my wife, and you should live with me. How would you like that?" he asked.

She shuddered as she met his gaze. "Let me go," she almost shrieked.

He released her arm with a little laugh. "Don't make such a noise," he said. "Some one might hear."

But some one had heard. So absorbed had they been that they had not noticed the faint splash of oars as a boat came down the stream. Reginald Aston was within a few yards when he heard Stella's cry, and his first impulse had been to leap on the bank and assure himself of her safety. But when, as his boat touched the shore, he had looked through the bushes and seen who her companion was, he had hesitated, and the next words that reached his ears had so astonished him that, without thinking of what he was doing, he had sat down again and listened.

It was Stella who was speaking.

"I am not so friendless now as I was when you persuaded me into that marriage," she said steadily; "but even if I were I would not stand by and see Miss Hamley so abominably treated."

"My dear Stella"—he had returned to his ordinary suave voice—"why will you be so foolish? As I have told you before, Julian Morton is dead. You and I are the only people who know or who ever can know the truth. If you were to tell every one your story no one would believe you. You couldn't possibly prove it, and the only thing you would do would be to publish to the world the fact that you had been married to a rather disreputable actor who was now dead. You could do me no harm, but what would it mean for yourself? Your present employers would most likely think that you were not a fit person to whom to intrust their children, and your chances with that worthy young squire would be gone. Now if you remain quiet and don't interfere with me, you can marry him and be comfortable for the rest of your life."

Stella instinctively moved further away from him.

"How can you think that I would do such a thing? Sooner than do him any harm I would incur your anger a hundred times."

He got up and looked down the pathway.

"There's some one coming," he said. "We had better not be seen together, and really there is nothing more to say. There are two courses open for you: either be silent and everything will be well, or tell every one that I am Julian Morton and your husband, which no one will believe, and take the consequences. You can have a week to decide. Meet me here next Tuesday." And with a courteous bow, for one of the villagers was approaching, he left her.

Stella sat silent and motionless for some while. What should she do, she kept wondering, but her mind seemed too confused to give her any answer. Then she remembered the river behind her, and for one brief moment she felt tempted, but only for one moment, for the remembrance of Reginald Aston came to her. What would he think? And then there was Miss Hamley—she must be undeceived.

"Heaven help me to do right," she cried aloud in her wretchedness, and then she rose and started walking wearily homewards.

Reginald climbed on to the bank and watched her till she was out of sight; then he took the boat back to the mill and went quickly home, having already made up his mind as to which course he should take. At nine o'clock he was at the door of Mr. Ashford's lodgings. Mr. Ashford was in, so he was shown upstairs immediately, and as he stood for a moment unperceived in the doorway, he had time to look round the room, which, in all its arrangements, now struck him as being so singularly unfitted for its occupant. It was a large bow-windowed room, furnished in most expensive and semi-ecclesiastical manner. The walls were pale blue, and the carpet and curtains a deep crimson of a *fleur de lys* pattern. Prints of cathedrals and engravings of celebrated religious pictures hung on the walls, and in a niche in the carved oak Gothic over-mantel stood a crucifix, while in one corner, at a handsome American organ with gilt pipes, sat the curate himself, playing fragments of religious music in a manner that showed that his musical reputation was not overrated.

He turned round, and as he saw Reginald, he advanced towards him.

"Delighted to see you, my dear Aston," he said easily. "I hope this time you've come to supper, as I've always been asking

you to. It will be up directly, though I'm sure I don't know what I have to offer you."

Reginald looked him full in the face. He felt that what he had to do had better be done as quickly as possible.

"I have come to ask you what you know of Julian Morton," he said.

The curate staggered, and, though the lights were shaded, Reginald could see that every atom of colour left his face.

"Is this a joke?" he asked, trying to smile.

"No," answered Reginald, "it isn't. I know that William Ashford and Julian Morton were together in London, and later on in Yorkshire, and I want to learn one or two things more."

The curate hesitated for a few moments; he was beginning to recover his self-possession.

"That is quite true," he said at last. "We were together. But the thought of all that time is very painful to me, and I had hoped that no one but my father and the bishop, who is my father's great friend, knew about it. However, if you wish to learn anything about Julian Morton, I will do my best to gratify your curiosity."

"He hasn't been an actor for nothing," said Reginald to himself, and then aloud: "I had a friend, a Captain Castell, staying with me a little while ago, and it was he who told me about Julian Morton. When he saw you he was struck with your resemblance to him."

"As a great many other people were," answered the other, who was now quite himself again.

"And he told me something about him, how once he had been in the same regiment, and, after being suspected for some time, he had been caught by his brother officers cheating at cards. And that they had been so enraged that they had branded him with the word 'cheat' on his arm. Now, Mr. Ashford, I have noticed, when you were playing tennis, that you wore a bandage on your arm. What is it for?"

The curate had fallen back in his chair, and for a moment he was unable to speak.

"What do you mean?" he managed to get out at last.

"I mean that you are Julian Morton—an impostor." And before the curate could resist, Reginald had seized and bared his arm, revealing the mark. "And what is more, I was in a

boat on the river this afternoon, and heard what you said to Miss Halifax."

"An eavesdropper!"

"I heard her call out, and as I thought that she was being molested I came to the bank, and after hearing your first words I had no hesitation in listening."

"And what are you going to do? What was your object in coming to me?"

"To tell you my decision. I've got you at my mercy so I don't like being too hard upon you. I suppose it's conniving at felony, but I will let you escape; but on these conditions: you must sign a full confession, which I shall show to the earl at the end of three days, and you must promise not to molest Miss Halifax."

"I must leave her for you?" with a sneer.

Reginald got up and stood before him. "You had better be careful what you say," he said in a low voice.

"All right, I'll be careful," with an attempt to force a laugh. "But if I refuse your terms, what then?"

"I shall have you arrested immediately."

"Arrested? you can't; it's no affair of yours."

"There's another charge on which you would be arrested," said Reginald. "Do you remember being at Brighton three years ago? Captain Castell told me that the police had the clue to a certain mystery, but that as you were supposed to be dead it had not been followed up."

The curate's look was so ghastly that Reginald almost pitied him.

"All right," he said. "I'll do whatever you like." So in a few minutes the confession was drawn up, and the landlord and his wife, whose surprise was intense, having witnessed it, Reginald put it in his pocket and left the house.

The next morning Everleigh was startled by a dreadful occurrence. Mr. Ashford, the curate, had gone to the station early to catch the express, and just as it had got into the station he had missed his footing and fallen in front of it on to the line. "Though how he came to do it I can't make out," said the station-master. "I must say he did walk a little bit unsteady, and if it had been any one else I should have thought he'd been drinking. He must have been killed immediately." And

for some days this was almost the sole topic of conversation. One thing puzzled his landlady and that was why, if, as he said, he was only going away for a day or two, he should have troubled to pack all his silver and other valuables into his portmanteau. But this was never cleared up, and to this day the inhabitants of Everleigh do not know the truth of the case. For the Earl of Dulchester, to whom Reginald sent the confession, felt such a dread of the scandal which would ensue if the facts were known, that he decided to let the matter rest as it was, and asked Reginald to keep his own counsel. Therefore the curate was buried at Everleigh church, and though people considered it strange that none of his relations attended the funeral, and though they made various conjectures thereon, yet their wildest imaginings never got further than the idea that he had quarrelled with his relations again, and was once more meditating a flight. And his having taken his valuables with him lent probability to this version of the story, which, when moreover no tombstone was erected to his memory and the interest began gradually to die away, was generally accepted as the true one.

* * * * *

It was spring when Reginald Aston, who had been away on a long yachting expedition, returned. For Stella's sake he had forced himself to stay away, but now that six months had elapsed he felt that he might return.

"She has not been at all well," said Lady Osmond, when on the day after his return Reginald had called and asked to be allowed to see her. "She seems to have been fretting about something, and Dr. Wilson thinks she must have received a shock. She is in my boudoir; I will take you to her. Here is some one who wishes to see you, Stella," she remarked as she opened the door.

Miss Halifax was sitting by the window. She turned as she heard Lady Osmond's voice, and as her glance fell on the tall figure in the doorway, the colour rushed to her face and a joyful expression came into her eyes. Lady Osmond stayed till the first greetings were over and a few commonplace remarks made. Then she excused herself and left the room.

"So that's it, is it?" she murmured to herself with a smile. "I wonder I never guessed it. To think that I and the doctor

should both have been deceived by a lovers' quarrel!" Then she went downstairs and confided her surmises to Maud. "Why, of course. I knew it all along," was the only answer she got from that precocious damsel. In the meantime Reginald had sat down by Stella, and suddenly, almost before he knew himself what he was doing, he had seized her hands and poured forth his tale. She listened to him, but at the end she gently released herself, and moved away from him. "There is something I must tell you first," she said slowly. "I could not marry you unless you knew it, so I must tell you even at the risk of losing your love." She paused as though she hardly knew how to begin. He rose and put his arms round her. "My darling," he said, "you must not pain yourself by remembering all that wretched story. And there is no need, as I know all." And then at last, resting in her lover's arms, and with her head on his shoulder, she found peace.

Christmas.

THE last sere leaf has fall'n and curled,
Far over seas the songsters fly,
The blast sweeps lonely o'er a world
That mourns their gentle minstrelsy.

The wintry lea is swathed in white ;
An icy grasp is on the flow
Of all the streams ; and, swift and light
And silent, falls the veil of snow.

But kindly deed and warm embrace
Flout the drear time with happy scorn ;
The smile lives yet upon Love's face,
And in our heart the Christ is born.

R. WARWICK BOND.

The Decay of the Art of Conversation.

A REMARKABLE characteristic of the present age is the lapse and decay of the art of conversation. I propose in this article to give reasons for and proofs of its decay, and also to consider how those who are desirous may endeavour to improve themselves in what is now almost a lost art. Speaking broadly, it may be said that the feebleness of present day conversation is one of the signs of the times. This is the age of cheap things, whether they be metal goods from Birmingham or shoes from Northampton. The demand in everything is for quantity, not quality, and it is the demand which regulates every market. Birmingham can and does turn out goods of the best workmanship and finish, but every year the quantity decreases ; while, to compete with foreign nations, she is obliged to turn out a vast quantity of cheap and inferior articles, and the demand for these increases. So with boots. Instead of the leather being tanned in oak bark for a sufficient time, it is chemically treated so that it may be used almost at once. Boots can thus be made very much cheaper, and this is what the market demands. These two instances may be considered typical of the state of nearly all our manufactures ; the prevailing note of the market cries is for cheapness, and machine-made articles of inferior material, instead of hand-made ones of superior material, is the result.

Now the spirit which animates the present generation in their manufactures animates them also in their social life, and to this may be traced the fact that conversation of good quality is seldom met with. Trouble is saved by gabbling instead of conversing ; time also is saved ; more tittle-tattle can be got through in a given time, and consequently Society can attend more functions in a given time. Owing to the superficial spirit pervading us in our social functions, we have come to consider, not so much the quality of Society's entertainments as their number and magnitude. The less exclusive character of modern Society, its wider-open door, and consequently its enormous increase in size, with its decrease in quality, have brought about this result. The

famous *salons*, where learning was appreciated, where wit sparkled, and real conversation was the aim and object of the company, have almost disappeared. Society does not want such exclusiveness, such cleverness; its hordes are far too numerous and too *bizarre* to make such functions desirable, and so, before the flood of mediocrity and superficiality, they have been swept away. The sea which has swept so many heterogeneous items into the ranks of Society has done it by the tidal wave of democracy, by the wave of plutocracy with all its concomitant influences, and by other waves of smaller size and infinite variety. Slowly and surely have the *grandes dames*, who so often collected together brilliant men and women, and presided amongst them with grace and charm, vanished away. Thus is it that the art of conversing has been allowed gradually to fade. As Society has not encouraged the art, those who might have kept up its cultivation have not done so. This is the reason why one hardly ever hears clever and sustained conversation. Even in the best clubs, where men of leisure and culture resort, to a large extent for the purpose of meeting their friends, it is remarkable of what a poor quality the conversation usually is. Whyte-Melville, who knew Society when it was considered a desirable thing to speak wittily and cleverly, relates in one of his novels ("Digby Grand," I believe) how a certain member of White's Club was constantly to be seen in the famous bow window, dispensing the pearls and rubies of his conversation amongst the boys of quality. A characteristic story of Macaulay is told. One summer morning, while seated in his garden, some friends gathered around him, and, charmed by his conversation, remained there during the whole day; from "morn to dewy eve" did they listen, spell-bound and unconscious of the advance of time. This, of course, is an exceptional kind of conversation and would be out of place in general Society, for Macaulay did all the talking and his friends the listening. Such could of course only occur in a small circle of intimate friends, but it illustrates that kind of conversation which is so very rare now, namely, that which is continued and sustained, and which may be aptly compared to the flight of a bird in the air, maintained for a definite time without its alighting anywhere. The usual kind of society talk is, perhaps necessarily, what may be termed small-talk, and, slightly altering our simile above, it may be compared to the hopping of a bird

from twig to twig, as opposed to a sustained flight. What, however, is so striking is that this small-talk has become so extremely feeble, empty and prosaic. Oftentimes it consists of nothing but inanities about the weather; it is rich in monosyllabic affirmatives and negatives, and when a new fact is stated it is only in the baldest language. There is no attempt at making the conversation lively, witty or original. Metaphors are never employed, similes are never resorted to, new words are never brought into play to clothe an old and hackneyed commonplace, and fresh ideas are never entertained with regard to anything once considered. Nearly everywhere it is the same. The exceptions which are to be met with are nearly always amongst those who belong to the old school, and the fresh and invigorating charm of their conversation is all the more striking from its rarity.

I now propose to say a few words on the cultivation of this art; and even in these days it is well worth the trouble of acquiring, both for its intrinsic worth and the pleasure it affords to others. Some few years ago there appeared in one of the magazines an article entitled, "How to become a Conversationalist." The advice given to acquire this art was to mark notable phrases, paragraphs, and expressions met with in the course of reading (and special literature in which suitable expressions would be likely to occur was mentioned), and to copy these down in a book and commit them to memory. They would then, it was asserted, be ever ready for use—a mental note-book of impromptus; and one phrase in the article itself was specially put forth as an example of what the writer meant. "One would be enabled to tittle fearless somersaults in any society," said he, if the course advocated were adopted. Now I am bound to say that I consider that this is the way not to learn the art of conversation. It will be found to be excessively difficult to bring in set phrases at suitable times; and by trying to lead up to an opportunity to use a particular phrase, the scope of conversation is at once greatly restricted, and, after all, it is always a question if the chance can be created, for the conversation of others must determine to a certain extent what can be logically said in any instance in which such an opportunity is being sought. Even if phrases were occasionally thus dragged in, any hitch would spoil all, and hesitation or precipitation would be utterly ridiculous. For far stronger reasons, however, such a course is to be depre-

cated. Originality is thereby banished, for it is the ready-made phrases which are to be used according to this prescription. Freedom is restricted, imagination is cabined, cribbed, confined by such a process. Imagination it is, to my mind, which is the key to the art we are desirous to attain. The lack of imagination, said Mr. Beerbohm Tree, in his recent lecture at the Royal Institution, is one of the chief obstacles to the actor's successful career, and I would apply this saying in the case of him who would be a brilliant and clever conversationalist. Only by letting the imagination roam freely and untrammelled can originality be attained, and this is perhaps the most important attribute of the art of conversation; for fresh ideas about a given subject may be developed, a new method of looking at it may be discovered, by giving the imagination play; and freshness and originality are the pith and the marrow of conversation. By striving constantly to be original either in method of thought or expression of speech, to say something witty, or to compound an epigram, when engaged in conversation (and when alone too), one can undoubtedly cultivate a facility for accomplishing these ends. Time—if the habit be carefully fostered—will work wonders, and rapidity and quality, both of thought and expression, will undergo a great change for the better. Happy similes often give point and piquancy to conversation, as before stated, and here is an open field where the flowers of rhetoric are to be gathered, if pains be taken to discover them. The habit of striving after the various attributes which combine to make up good conversation should always be tenderly nurtured, and by encouraging these attributes to germ forth and grow up in oneself, instead of attempting to gather those which flourish in others, one will display the fresh green foliage and living shoots of the tree of knowledge of the art of conversation, instead of the dry leaves and rotten twigs which have been collected elsewhere.

Margaretta.

By CECIL LEIGH.

ALTHOUGH no one would have called Mary Brown a beautiful girl, some people indeed going so far as to say that she was not even a pretty one, still the girl's face had a certain subtle charm that made most men when they had looked at her once look again— a charm, however, that was due rather to expression than to beauty of feature; and also the girl had a good figure, was graceful in her movements and endowed with that most excellent gift in woman, "a voice, soft, gentle and low." It was particularly soft and gentle as she pleaded earnestly:

"You will not send me away, Cousin Maggie?" and the girl looked so sad and pitiful as she recounted the troubles that had sent her to kind Mrs. Osgood for help and comfort, that the latter replied at once:

"No, my dear, no; you shall stay as long as you like and welcome, but——"

"Oh, don't say that you think I am wrong, that I ought to marry this 'honourable gentleman,'" speaking the last words in a tone of infinite scorn.

"My dear, are you not rather unjust to the young man? Remember, it is your father and his who have made the arrangement."

"But he must have consented; he is a man, not a poor helpless girl like I am."

"Still, it does not do to act too hastily. Why not see him?"

"To be declined with thanks if I don't find favour in his eyes, or if Papa Brown's money bags are not so full as he expected. No, thank you, Cousin Maggie. If I marry at all, which I much doubt, I mean to be wooed for myself."

"My dear, I may be old-fashioned, but I don't like to hear you speak of your father as Papa Brown and in that tone."

"It is not I who call him by that name; I was only repeating

to you the way in which they speak of him. Do you think, Cousin Maggie, this lord would be so anxious for me to marry his son if I were poor Mary Brown instead of rich Miss Brown, of Hawkhurst?" The girl spoke bitterly, but before Mrs. Osgood could answer, the door opened and the servant announced:

"The carriage is at the door, miss."

"Thanks; I am coming," rising as she spoke. "I suppose I must go, Cousin Maggie; besides, I promised Fred to pick him up at the station."

"I think it would be better to go, dear; do not vex your father more than is necessary."

"I do not mean or wish to vex him at all, but to such a marriage I cannot and will not consent."

Mrs. Osgood perfectly agreed with her young cousin upon this matter, but being a peacemaker by nature, not only refrained from speaking a single word that would add to Mary's anger, but used every means in her power to smooth down matters between the father and daughter; so far, however, her gentle counsels had been of no avail, for Mr. Brown was quite determined that his only child and heiress should make what he called 'a good,' viz., an 'aristocratic,' marriage.

This ambition, however, was not shared by Mary, who had her own ideas, and these pretty strong ones too, upon the subject of love and matrimony, so when she was informed by her father that a marriage had been arranged by himself and Lord Widdicombe between that gentleman's younger son, the Honourable Lindsay Josselyn, and herself, the girl had quietly but very decidedly declined the proposed alliance. Now, although Mr. Brown was a choleric as well as an obstinate old gentleman, he was a shrewd one also, and, knowing that Mary had inherited some of the first-named qualities from himself, smothered his annoyance for the time being, and quietly asked "upon what grounds she based her refusal."

"Need you ask, papa?" hastily.

"Certainly, Margaretta, I must ask, for it is really due to me, as your father, to know why you so deliberately run counter to my wishes for your future welfare and happiness."

Of late Mr. Brown had taken to speak of his daughter by her second name, as being a more distinctive title for his heiress, and

Mary, when she heard it now used in speaking to her, understood that the matter in question was a serious one, and answered more calmly :

“ For one thing, papa, I don't know him.”

“ Oh, that will soon be remedied ; Mr. Josselyn is coming here.”

“ Coming here to see and inspect me as if I were a bale of goods to be disposed of.”

“ He is coming here as my guest, and listen to me, child,” putting up his hand warningly as she was about to speak. “ I expect you to receive him as I wish ; the arrangement is one that is satisfactory to me as your father.”

“ And to Lord Widdicombe,” broke in Mary, too angry to keep silence any longer, “ as the father of an impecunious son whose debts he hopes to see paid by your hard-earned money.”

Although the girl knew absolutely nothing personally of either Lord Widdicombe or his son, and had but drawn her bow at a venture, she knew that the shaft had hit the mark when her father answered sharply :

“ Don't be a fool, Mary, and speak of what you know nothing about ; all young men are more or less extravagant.”

“ I know one thing, father, and that is that no young man, be he the son of a peer or of a carpenter, wants to marry a girl he has never seen without some bad motive, and in this case the motive is your money.”

“ That's my affair and not yours ; I am sure I don't know what you want, child.”

“ I don't want to marry at all. Oh, papa, why are you so anxious to get rid of me ; am I not a good and loving child to you ? ”

“ You have been, Mary ; you have been, and I hope you will be both good and obedient. I am doing all I can for you. This young fellow is good-looking and agreeable, one whom any girl might like ; he's well-born too, and will succeed his father some day, for his half-brother is a confirmed invalid and will never marry.”

“ Poor fellow,” murmured Mary, “ and his brother speculates upon his death. I don't know what other girls might do, papa, but I could never like a man who does that and is also willing to marry a girl whom he has never seen for her money.”

"It is mere childish folly to talk in that way, Mary. Besides, didn't I tell you that Mr. Josselyn was coming down here?"

"To see me?" she asked, quietly enough.

"Yes, to see you," he returned, "and then——"

"And then," interrupted the girl, "he will take or leave me, as it pleases him, I suppose," the anger that she had been striving so hard to keep under control blazing out in hot passionate words of indignant reproach. For the girl's pride, her modesty, her every womanly feeling was hurt and outraged by the thought that this man had actually bargained to see her before he finally decided whether to accept or refuse her hand as an accompaniment to Papa Brown's money.

"Oh! the shame and humiliation of it," exclaimed the poor girl, as she stood alone at the window of the big, luxuriously-furnished drawing-room and watched her father drive away from the house without having spoken even one kind word to her in farewell. "Why won't he see that such an arrangement is an insult to himself as well as to me?"

An hour or two later Mary left the house also and betook herself to town, to seek from Mrs. Osgood the sympathy, comfort and advice she was so sorely in need of, and which she was sure of receiving from one who had ever proved herself a true friend and wise counsellor to the motherless girl. As gladly and freely as it was given was the sympathy accepted, but the advice "to be patient, to do nothing rashly," was not so palatable or easily taken by Mary, who was smarting under the feeling of injustice and insult. "There are times when weakness is wicked," she urged warmly.

"There are times when gentleness is strength," replied Mrs. Osgood. "Now, dear, go, or you will be late, and while you are away I will write to your father and say that you are with me."

"And going to remain——"

"For a little while, until things arrange themselves a little; they always do if one is patient, my dear. At present you are both hot and angry; when you are cooler you will both see things differently." And as she spoke the old lady shook her white curls wisely and smiled encouragement to the girl, who could not refuse to smile in return, even to laugh, as she called her 'a silly old darling.' But the smile died from the girl's lips as she entered the carriage and started for Eaton Place, where she had

promised some days before to have tea with their county member's wife, which engagement Mrs. Osgood was making good use of in her letter to Mr. Brown as a reason for Mary having come up to town that day, and pleading the fog as an excuse for her not returning until the morrow.

"It is quite true, the fog is getting worse," with a glance at the window; "I only hope it will not grow very thick before she gets home. It would never do to let her travel back to Hawk-hurst to-night in it, and it will not do, either," she added, with a half-smile, half-sigh, "to let them meet until they are both a little cooler, or they will talk themselves into a quarrel, for William is dreadfully obstinate when he takes an idea into his head, and Mary—well, yes, the dear child does certainly like to have her own way in some things also," which concluding remark shows how even the best and most well-meaning of women are influenced by their affections. Ah, well! if every one followed only the dictates of the head, this world would certainly be very different from what it is. Perhaps it might be a wiser one—who can say?—but certainly it would not be half so pleasant to live in.

So absorbed was Mary in her own thoughts, that at first she did not notice how fast the fog was creeping on, enveloping everything and every one in its chill, gloomy embrace, transforming the hurrying passers-by into dim ghostlike forms, and giving to the houses a strange, unnatural appearance as they loomed out dark and indistinct through the surrounding yellow-grey clouds; but when she did the girl at once pulled the check-string, opened the window, and demanded of the coachman:

"Jenkins, do you think it is safe to go on?"

"I ain't Jenkins, miss; he's laid up with the rheumatism, and I'm doing his work for him. I'm Thomas Masson, miss, and I can't say as how I think it would be wise to go on."

"We certainly won't go to Eaton Place, but I promised to meet Mr. Osgood at Sloane Square Station. We are near there, aren't we?"

"Yes, miss, it ain't very far."

"Then we will go there," decided Mary, "but no further."

On arrival that morning in town, Mary had happened quite accidentally to meet Fred Osgood, and would at once and gladly have confided her trouble to him, had time permitted, but Fred

was a busy man, and had an appointment that could not be put off, so this meeting at the station had been arranged.

"You can tell me what's wrong as we drive home, and whatever it is we'll see you out of it somehow," he added confidently, and the words and the knowledge that Fred would stand by her in any and every difficulty and trouble cheered the girl and strengthened her courage. For Mary had looked upon Fred Osgood in the light of a brother all her life; they had played together as children, and he being some years the elder, had, as is the way of boys, alternately petted, teased and domineered over her; but as the years passed on the tables were turned, and it was Mary who then took the lead, and was the recipient, not of teasings and jokings, but of the lad's hopes and fears and ambitions, his scrapes, his loves and his despairs, all of which were listened to with the deepest sympathy; in short, they had been as brother and sister together, and the frank cordial affection between them was true and strong as that of brother and sister, and without one tinge of any warmer or deeper feeling, then or now.

"Perhaps Fred may know something of this Mr. Josselyn," then blushed, ashamed; for she knew that the hope of this something being to Mr. Josselyn's disadvantage was in her heart, and the blush was still upon the girl's cheek when the carriage stopped before the station. Dimly through the fog Mary discerned Fred Osgood's tall figure, and opening the carriage door, beckoned to him with her hand, saying as he came nearer, "Make haste, dear boy; he knows where to go to." Then she drew back into her corner to allow enough room for "Fred's long legs." As he took his seat and they started homewards, Mary continued in an affectionate voice, laying her hand upon his: "I am so glad you waited for me. I should not at all have liked to drive home by myself in this awful fog. Why, I have actually not seen your face yet, it is so dark. Luckily for me, Fred, that I knew your 'long figure'—as nurse calls it—so well." Though this was said with a laugh, it did not, as Mary expected, call forth an answering one from Fred. Wondering at his silence, and also a little alarmed by it, she asked anxiously, "What is it, Fred? Is anything the matter, dear?"

"I am not Fred. I think there has been some mistake," answered her companion.

"Not Fred? Then who are you?" demanded the girl in a tone that was at once frightened and angry.

"Lindsay Josselyn."

At the mention of this name Mary started and shrank back in horror, unable in her dismay and confusion to utter a sound as the speaker, all unknowing the effect of his words, explained how on his side the mistake had occurred.

"I had arranged to meet my sister at the station, and when your carriage drove up and I saw a lady beckon to me, I took it for granted it was her. It is impossible to distinguish faces in this fog."

"But I spoke. I called out, 'Make haste.'"

"Yes, and added the words 'dear boy,' which confirmed me in my opinion, for the expression is a favourite one with her, and she has, like you—I mean your voices are similar in tone."

Even at that moment Mary, womanlike, could not help wondering what were the words he had refrained from speaking. Then seeing him put out his arm to find and pull the check-string, said, though with what motive the girl herself could not have told :

"I am Miss Brown."

It was now his turn to be startled at a name, for a Miss Brown had been occupying much of his thoughts of late, and that not too pleasantly. It was of a Miss Brown, too, he had been thinking as he stood in the fog waiting for his sister. It was a curious coincidence, certainly, that this girl with the sweet voice should also be a Miss Brown, but nothing more, of course. Still it was in a tone of suppressed eagerness that he said, "May I ask what is your Christian name?" forgetting in his surprise to pull the check-string as he had intended.

"Mary," a sudden impulse seizing the girl to hide her own identity—not a difficult task to one bearing the name she did. ("Besides," Mary told herself defiantly, "it is my own name, by which all my friends know me. There is no deception in it, for it is only papa who sometimes calls me by that other one.") "Why did you wish to know?"

"Oh, my father has a friend, a Mr. Brown, who has a daughter. It sounds like a thing out of *Punch* that, doesn't it?" laughing rather awkwardly at his own explanations.

"Yes," was the quiet assent. "And this daughter, is her name Mary, too?"

"Oh dear, no; something much grander. She is called Margaretta."

"And you know her?"

"No, I don't know her. I have not even seen her." Then he pulled the check-string, apologizing once more for the mistake he had made, for he took the whole blame to himself, opened the door and got out. But as he was closing it, Masson leant back and said:

"It ain't safe, miss, to go on further without some one leading the horse."

"Don't be frightened, Miss Brown. I will see to that. There is really no danger." Then before Mary could say a word, Mr. Josselyn went to the horse's head, and the girl was alone, wondering if she were awake or dreaming, so unreal it all seemed—so utterly impossible that the man whom all that day she had been thinking of as her cruellest enemy, and speaking of in the most bitter terms, was now guiding her through the darkness and gloom to safety and home.

Could this be the Lindsay Josselyn of whom her father had spoken that very day? There might be another of the name. But no! It must be the same, for he had said his father had a friend, Mr. Brown, whose daughter was named Margaretta. "How glad I am that he has never seen me," thought Mary, as she remembered with a hot blush how she had lain her hand upon his and called him dear.

"Mr. Josselyn!" leaning out of the window and speaking so softly that she had to repeat the call before he heard. "Really there is no need for you to take so much trouble." As she said this several men with torches appeared, and one of them coming up to the carriage, raised his torch aloft in such a manner that the light fell full upon them, and thus Lindsay Josselyn and Mary Brown looked on one another's faces for the first time, and as their eyes met both smiled, and Mary continued, the soft colour flushing her cheek as she spoke. "Indeed I cannot let you go any further out of your way. Perhaps this man," turning to the torch-bearer, "will lead the horse for me?" a proposal which the man agreed to—for a consideration; so off they started again, this time Mr. Josselyn not leading, but walking

beside the carriage, his hand resting upon the open window, as he said :

"You must not send me away, Miss Brown: Do you not remember saying to me, when you thought I was Fred, that you would not like to drive home alone in this fog?"

Yes, Mary remembered having said this, she told him softly.

"Then, as I have taken his place in one thing, will you not let me act still further in his stead and see you safe home?"

"But is it not dreadfully out of your way? I have to go to Kensington."

"Not in the least. Indeed there is no use saying more about it, for I don't mean to be sent away until you are safe at home."

"I am staying with a cousin, Mrs. Osgood; it was her son whom I went to meet at the station," and then she told him how on her side the mistake had arisen, that this had made them companions.

"Am I so like him?" he asked, wondering at the same time if the cousins were affianced lovers; and, remembering how she had placed her hand on his and called him dear, decided that they must be, and though of course it did not matter to him in any way, he hoped the fellow was a nice one and "worthy of the girl."

"You are only like Fred in figure," Mary had answered, and then she too became silent, and for a little while each was busy thinking of the other; then hovering as does a bird near its nest when strangers draw close, fearful of its secret being discovered, and yet unable to tear itself away from the dangerous neighbourhood, Mary broke the silence with :

"You seemed quite startled when I told you my name, Mr. Josselyn, and yet it is not an uncommon one."

"I was for the moment," he admitted. "The truth was that my thoughts had been a good deal occupied by a namesake of yours."

"The one you spoke of, Miss Margaretta Brown?"

"Yes, and the coincidence of your being a Miss Brown also struck me as being strange."

"Why should it?" she asked, growing bolder in her questioning, "for neither my surname nor my Christian one are by any means uncommon."

Mr. Josselyn did not answer her question ; instead he quoted softly :

“ The sweetest name that mortals bear,
And she to whom it first was given,
Was half of earth and half of heaven.”

* * * * *

“ Then you have quite determined that this marriage shall take place,” said Mrs. Osgood, during an interview with Mr. Brown upon the subject that had brought Mary to town the day before.

“ Quite determined,” setting his lips firmly ; “ and remember, Margaret, that it is only on condition that you do not try to influence her against my wishes, which are entirely for her welfare, that I have given permission for Margarettta to remain with you while Fred is away.”

“ Yes, I quite understand ; but, William, there is one thing I must ask you : is there anything against this Mr. Josselyn’s character that——

“ Nothing, Margaret,” he interrupted ; “ nothing. Would I wish to see my girl married to him if there were ? ” This in a hurt tone.

“ No, of course not. Forgive me, William, for asking, but I heard that he was in debt.”

“ So are most young men in his position. I acknowledge that he has been careless, too careless perhaps, about money matters.” If it had been any one else, Fred Osgood for instance, Mr. Brown would have called this carelessness gross extravagance. This Mrs. Osgood knew, but being a wise old lady and anxious to keep Mr. Brown in a good humour, she kept this knowledge to herself, and suppressed even the shadow of a smile.

“ I am anxious to see my daughter well and suitably settled,” continued Mr. Brown pompously, “ and I did think she was a sensible girl.”

“ So she is, William,” broke in Cousin Maggie, in eager defence of her favourite, “ and a dear, good, loving child as well. You should not blame her,” she added with a laugh, “ for having inherited some of your decision of character.”

“ Nor do I, Margaret,” unbending at this subtle flattery ; “ but we must not let firmness degenerate into obstinacy.”

“ They are very nearly related sometimes, William,” this with

a twinkle in the kindly old eyes, that Mr. Brown, however, fortunately did not see.

"On the contrary, they are quite distinct; obstinacy is a fault, firmness is a virtue.

"Until it degenerates," added Mrs. Osgood demurely; then in a different tone, "but you will not find Mary obstinate: what she requires is time to become reconciled to the idea. Remember, she knew nothing of it until yesterday, and she is very young, William, and motherless."

"True, true, poor girl," this in a softer voice.

"When she knows Mr. Josselyn, perhaps——"

"But she has refused even to see him. Most awkward for me, for I have invited him to Hawkhurst to make her acquaintance. Fortunately he is not able to come to-morrow."

"When did you hear that?"

"Only this morning, otherwise I could not have allowed her to remain on here."

"Yes, of course; and, William, I think I can promise that when Mr. Josselyn does go to Hawkhurst, Mary will be there to receive him."

"Ah, if you only knew," thought Mrs. Osgood, with a smile, "that Mr. Josselyn was seated in this very room not twenty-four hours ago, having tea with Mary and me, how astonished you would be," but these thoughts were not spoken aloud, for the secret was Mary's, and she had promised to keep it for a little while, only a little while, and then—the old lady smiled again, happy at the picture she saw in the future, of Mary, who was to her as a daughter, at peace with her father, a loved and loving wife. For Cousin Maggie had been quick to note that the two young people, who had become so strangely acquainted, had taken a mutual liking to one another. And when, during the days that followed this first meeting, each afternoon saw Lindsay Josselyn installed upon some excuse or another in Mrs. Osgood's pretty drawing-room, that lady felt sure that the liking was fast becoming on both sides love. And she, as well as her young guest, smiled a friendly welcome upon their visitor.

During those days, spite of the fog and rain that made the outside world so dull, chill and drear, Mary lived in the light that never was on sea or land, in a world of brightness and sunshine created by the mighty power of love, and peopled with

sweet fancies and fair hopes, from which, however, she was all too soon recalled to the hard, stern realities of every-day life by the arrival of a telegram from her father. The message was but a short one: "Return Thursday without fail. Expect L. J." Short as it was, however, Mary read it over two or three times before she could realize all that it meant to her. Then with a little shiver, as if she were suddenly awakening to the chill and gloom of the real world around her, the girl handed the telegram to Mrs. Osgood, who rose and went to the table, upon which the servant had placed the lighted lamp, for it was afternoon and the winter days were short and dark.

"It can't be true, Cousin Maggie," the girl rather questioned than affirmed. "He would have told us yesterday if he were going."

"Why did not your father write? I hate these telegrams. They are so short and unsatisfactory."

The old lady spoke shortly, almost sharply, in the terrible fear and doubt that had seized her. Could she have been mistaken in thinking Lindsay Josselyn cared for Mary? Had she by allowing his visits brought to her young cousin sorrow and suffering instead of love and happiness? The very thought was a cruel one, but before she could answer either herself or Mary, the servant announced:

"Mr. Josselyn."

"I was just saying that I hate these things," said Mrs. Osgood briskly, as she went forward telegram in hand to greet her visitor, and standing between him and Mary in such a way as to shield the latter from observation, thus giving the girl time to recover her composure. "They always bring me disagreeable news."

"I hope nothing serious this time, Mrs. Osgood."

"It means that I am to lose Mary, and I call being left alone very serious."

"But I shall come back to you very soon, and, besides, you will have Fred home in a day or two."

"Ah, that reminds me. I haven't sent off my letters. If you will excuse me, Mr. Josselyn, I will go and do it at once, and, Mary, I will send an answer to this for you."

And away bustled the old lady, in the hope that the two young people, if alone, would come to an understanding. At first it

seemed as if both of them had lost the power of speech, so silent were they, then Lindsay Josselyn asked abruptly :

“When do you leave?”

“To-morrow.”

“And when will you return?”

“Ah, that I don't know; perhaps, most probably, indeed, not for some time.”

“Mary, will you listen to a story I want to tell you of myself?”

Then, as she murmured an assent, he told her of his follies and extravagances, and how at last his father had promised that he would pay his debts on condition that he would marry a girl with money.

“It sounds rather a cowardly way to get out of one's difficulties, does it not, Mary?” he asked bitterly; “even if the girl were willing to be sacrificed.”

“And is this girl willing?” asked Mary in a low voice. She had listened to him until now in silence, with clasped hands and bent head, but as she asked this question she raised her eyes and looked at him anxiously.

“No; I don't fancy she is. The arrangement so far has been entirely made by our respective fathers, but now I have to come to some decision, for my father has promised old Brown in my name that I will go down on Friday to his place, Hawkhurst.”

“Why have you told me this?” asked Mary.

“Because I love you, Mary, with my whole heart. I have no right to tell you this, I know, for I am too poor to ask you to be my wife, but I should not like you to think worse of me than necessary.”

“You are going to Hawkhurst?” said Mary in a low tone.

“No; I am going to leave England to try by honest hard work to redeem my past.”

“To leave England; but—but—if that girl loves you?”

“Love me; how can she? No, if she married me it would be to please her father, or because if anything happened to poor old Josselyn—which heaven forbid—I should step into his shoes.”

“Was it of this girl, Margaretta, that your thoughts were full that day we met?”

“Yes. She has one thing in her favour, Mary, she is your namesake.”

"And did you"—this was asked timidly, "did you intend, then, to marry her?"

A flush rose to Lindsay Josselyn's face at this question, but he admitted frankly :

"I am afraid so. It was a sore temptation. Don't think too hardly of me, Mary; remember, dear, I did not know you then."

What woman could have judged him hardly after that? Mary certainly could not.

"I don't think hardly of you, Lindsay," putting out her hand as she spoke.

Taking it in his, he bent down and pressed a warm kiss upon it; then, still holding it close, pleaded :

"Mary, dear, now that you know all, tell me, is there any hope of your caring for me some day, if——"

"I love you now," she answered softly and clearly, but scarcely were the brave words spoken than she hid her blushing face.

"And you will wait for me, my darling?"

"Yes; on one condition. You will grant me my first request, Lindsay," pleadingly.

"Don't make it too hard a one, Mary."

"It is quite easy. Don't try and see me, don't even write, until you have settled with your father and Margaretta."

"That will soon be done; but each day I don't see you will be an eternity."

Mary smiled, then said softly :

"And, Lindsay, remember, you are still free, so if you think, when you see her, that Margaretta would make you happy——"

But she was not allowed to finish her sentence, Lindsay ended it for her in a fashion that, to judge from Mary's smiles and blushes, was not absolutely disagreeable to her.

"DEAR MR. JOSSELYN,—

"I hope you will be able to come to us next Friday. My reason for asking you to do this is that I am desirous to speak with you upon a subject of interest to us both. The carriage will be at the station to meet the 3.40 train from London.

"Yours faithfully,

"M. BROWN."

6*

This was the letter that Lindsay Josselyn read to himself more than once on his way to Hawkhurst, whither he was proceeding on the Friday mentioned by Miss Brown in her note of invitation, an invitation which Lindsay would gladly have declined, if the girl had left him any possibility of doing so.

"What on earth did she want to see him for?" he wondered wrathfully; for the proposed interview was not a pleasant one to look forward to by any means, and he heartily wished it was well over. Then his glance fell upon the signature, M. Brown, and his thoughts flew off at once to Mary and the sweet confession of her love. And he forgot all about Margaretta until the train stopped and he alighted at Hawkhurst Station, where he found the carriage waiting to drive him to the house. On arrival there he was at once ushered into a large luxuriously-furnished drawing-room, lighted by softly-shaded lamps and sweet with the scent of hothouse flowers.

As Lindsay Josselyn glanced round the room, he was struck with the good taste evidenced on all sides, and decided, with a somewhat grave smile, that whatever Margaretta might be herself, her surroundings certainly were all that could be desired. As his wandering glances fell upon a tall pier-glass near, he saw reflected in it a heavy embroidered *portière* curtain, that was hung over a door at the further end of the room, which door led to a smaller drawing-room beyond; and as he looked at it, this curtain was slowly drawn aside and he saw, still reflected in the glass, the girl he loved, the girl for whose sake he was going to leave home and England and friends, enter the room.

For one moment he gazed bewildered, doubting his own eyesight; the next, he wheeled round and hurried towards her.

As he turned the girl stopped, then with outstretched hands came forward to meet him.

"Mary, you here?"

"Lindsay. Are you not glad to see me? I thought—I thought——"

"Glad to see you, my darling? Of course I am," taking both her trembling little hands in his and drawing her into his embrace.

"And you are not angry with me, Lindsay?"

"Angry with you, my love?" not understanding one bit what

the girl meant. "I am surprised to see you naturally. Why did you not tell me you knew these Browns, dear?"

"Oh, Lindsay, can't you understand?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I see now you are relations."

"And Lindsay," she pleaded softly, "won't you try and love Margaretta?"

"Mary," holding the girl from him and looking earnestly into the blushing, agitated face, "do you, the woman I love better than life itself, counsel me to do this thing? Do you not love me, Mary? Are the words you spoke on Wednesday evening not true?"

"Yes, yes; they are true, Lindsay. I love you—I love you. Oh, how can I explain? I am Margaretta. Don't turn from me, Lindsay. Can you not forgive me, dear?" raising beseeching eyes to his face. "I didn't mean to deceive you; but when you told me your name, that day in the fog, I couldn't, for very shame, tell you that I was Margaretta; but I didn't tell you an untruth, for my name is Mary; every one who loves me calls me that, except papa sometimes, and then, when I found I loved you—Oh, must I, need I, say more?"

For answer, Lindsay drew the girl closer, closer, and whispered, ere their lips met in "the long, fond kiss of love:"

"My own; my love. As long as you are that, my darling, what care I if to others you are Mary or Margaretta?"

A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),

Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE HONBLE JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE CATTLE SHED.

"ARTHUR, did you see that hoyden Belle Warrener jump over the hedge?"

Mrs. Stanmer, a good-looking, graceful woman of the unimpassioned blonde type, leant forward as she rather eagerly for her, addressed her son who faced her in the carriage.

"I saw the flutter of a petticoat as we turned into the lane, but I don't know that it was Belle."

"It was Belle, however much averse you may be to admit the fact. Even in the momentary glimpse I had of them I recognized her pretty little feet and slender ankles. It's a pity her face doesn't match her points."

"She has the dearest little face in the world. And look here, mother dear, don't find fault with Belle and call her names, and try to pick holes in everything she does. I am awfully fond of her, and if she'd have me I would marry her to-morrow."

"If she will have you! She will jump at you naturally enough, you poor infatuated boy."

"She hasn't shown much inclination to jump in my direction yet," the young squire of Dene Prior answered moodily.

"That reminds me," Mrs. Stanmer began, lying back with indolent grace among her wraps—Mrs. Stanmer was always "rather chilly" however sultry the weather might be. "That reminds me to ask you, where was Belle during the time she so politely disappeared from her mother's garden party yesterday? She was not with you?"

"No; she was not with me."

"I heard some of the later arrivals say they saw her in Vicarage Lane talking to a tramp! but I could hardly believe that."

"I could. If the tramp wanted food Belle would go and give it to him."

"People said she was talking to him as if he were her equal. Her father and Mrs. Warrener are a couple of blind fools to let the girl run loose in the way she does," Mrs. Stanmer said languidly. Then she dismissed the subject from her mind, while her son, who made no reply to his mother's last remark, swore mentally that he "would go and propose to dear little Belle" the next day.

At the same time that they were discussing her, Belle Warrener, having made her way rapidly across a meadow to a cattle shed that stood in a corner by the river, was watching with tender interest the voracious haste with which a dust-grimed and shabby but distinctly handsome man of about thirty was devouring the food she had brought him. He had taken it from her hands without a word of thanks, but she attributed his ingratitude to hunger, and did not feel the least resentful. When he had eaten half a chicken and drunk the contents of a big bottle of ale, he said, looking at her with a bold, admiring gaze:

"I always say the bred 'uns are the best plucked. How did you get away with the chick without the old 'uns nobbling you? Lord, a little teachin' and you'd help me to 'dress a hat' fine."

The girl held up her small prettily-poised head a trifle more haughtily as he spoke. But after looking at him thoughtfully with her steady grey eyes for a moment or two, she put her hand on his ragged sleeve and said gravely:

"Look here, Dick. I don't like the way you speak. You say you're obliged to do it when you're tram—travelling, or people wouldn't give you anything, but as you tell me you can speak better, why don't you do it when you're alone with me? And another thing, when I promised to be your friend, because I was sorry to see a man so broken down and nearly starved as you were, you promised that as soon as you were well you would go away from here and get honest work. That's six weeks ago and you're here still!"

He laughed and caught her hand in his.

"Come, young lady" (as she drew her hand angrily away), "it's no use your bletherin' me now. I'm a wary bloke, and I ain't a goin' to let you send me off as soon as you're tired of me. I've got fond of you, I have; and here I stay till you're willin' to come away and get married. Once we're married and I've got some Sunday togs, the old man 'ull come down handsome, and we'll start on the square."

"Married! *Married to you.* How dare you think of such a thing!" she asked indignantly, retreating further from him in anger and dismay. "Because I have been kind to you and given you food and money, you are base enough to insult me. I shall do nothing more for you now."

She turned to walk away, her face and heart both burning with rage and shame. For the first time she realized how indiscreet she had been in her charity.

He sprang after her with an oath.

"You stash that," he cried hoarsely; "you've been meeting me on the sly and bringing me chow all these weeks. You wouldn't a' done that if you hadn't fancied me."

"*Fancied you!* I pitied you," she said sadly; then she added bitterly, "and now! *Oh,* how disgusted I am with you now!"

He laughed insolently.

"You fancied me, I tell you. I'm a finer chap and a better-looking chap than you ever clapped eyes on before. I heard you say that with your own lips to another gal, one day when I was waitin' for you outside the garden wall."

She stamped with impotent rage.

"You listened to what you were not meant to hear? I thought you were a *manly* man at least. And after all, what if I did say you were the best-looking man I'd ever seen? I was only speakin' of you as I should of a picture, or a horse, or a dog."

The last sentence roused his always hot temper.

"Look here, young missus! you and me 'ad better 'ave it out. I fancy you, so it's no odds whether you fancy me or not. I mean to live like a gentleman from this day, and to see your 'honest work' further before I do a stroke. Young ladies what creep out of their homes with food and ale for a pal they want to lie low about, can't afford to pick and choose. You've liked me well enough all these weeks to meet me every day,

and give me all your pocket-money, now you'll have to go a bit further."

He sprang forward, seized her in his arms, and kissed her with violence regardless of her struggles. She did not dare to cry out for fear of any one coming and finding her in this compromising position.

"You're a brute!" she cried vehemently, when at length she freed herself. Or rather, he released her from his loathsome embrace. "You're a brute! I wish I had never been kind to you. You have lied to me, and deceived me, and insulted me."

"Not so fast," he interrupted, leering at her audaciously. "We were both playin' a farce. You picked me out of the gutter, as you'd have picked a 'handsome dog,' and you were pleased to see that I admired you, and was gettin' fond of you. It pleased you while I held my tongue and seemed to know my place, but all the time you forgot I was a man with a man's feelin's. Well, you know better now. Your fine friends won't look at you now, when they hear how the 'handsome tramp' (you've called me that yourself) has been meetin' you alone in the fields a-kissin' and huggin' you, and you lettin' him do it."

"You brute!" she cried fiercely.

He had caught hold of her and was kissing her again. Loathing and fear combined to make her forget prudence.

She lifted up her voice and screamed aloud.

Her cry was heard and answered. Mr. Stanmer, acting on some unaccountable instinct, had come back to the spot where he had caught sight of flying draperies as a girl had bounded over the hedge. In spite of his disavowal to his mother he had at once recognized that bounding form as Belle Warrener's, and a great longing to follow and find her possessed him. He was sauntering along the path to the cattle shed when he heard her cry, and in another instant he was grappling with the taller and far more powerful tramp.

The men fought like tigers for a few minutes, then Stanmer's science stood him in good stead against the superior brute force of the tramp. When the latter was stretched senseless on the ground Stanmer turned to Belle and asked :

"What were you doing here alone with that blackguard, Miss Warrener?"

She pointed to the wrecked half-carcase of the fowl and to the empty bottle.

"He was starving! I only meant to be kind to him till he could get work."

"And he—how has the villain rewarded you for your goodness?" he asked with suppressed passion.

"Don't torture me with questions, Mr. Stanmer. Come away! Take me home. I never want to see or hear of the brute again."

She was sobbing with excitement as she spoke, and to Mr. Stanmer she was looking more winning than ever.

"Did he dare to insult you?" he asked in a low voice.

To go back and "stamp the life out of the carrion" was in his mind, but Belle, seeing the white wrath in his face, clung to and fettered him.

"Don't go near him again!" she pleaded. "He has always been respectful till to-day. But to-day, when I told him to go away and get honest work, he got rude and threatened me."

"Threatened you!"

The girl shivered and hurried along very fast for a considerable distance before she answered:

"He said he would make me marry him!" in a whisper.

"What else?" Stanmer asked between his teeth.

"Then he—kissed me," she murmured. "Don't look like that. Oh, *don't* look like that."

"By heaven! he shall not live to tell the tale," Mr. Stanmer shouted, as he turned and made his way hastily back to the cattle shed. When he reached it the tramp had vanished, and though an exhaustive search was speedily made, no trace of Dick, the handsome tramp, could be found.

* * * * *

Loyally within his own breast Mr. Stanmer locked up the story of that appalling day in the cattle shed. He half guessed and Belle half confessed to him all her silly school-girlish love of romance, all her vanity, all her mistaken philanthropy and general folly. But though he believed her fully and forgave her freely, he did not carry out his intention of asking her to be his wife. The spectre of the tramp's audacious aspirations and insolent caresses rose up and mocked and deterred him whenever

he thought of doing so. Accordingly it soon got bruited about in the neighbourhood in which they both lived that "Mr. Stanmer's attention to Belle Warrener meant nothing at all," and that probably there was some truth in the rumour that had arisen that "the young lady was a little bit fast."

It was rather what may be described as a close neighbourhood, that in which the Stanmers and Warreners lived. Though it was a country village, it was not remote. By train it was only an hour from Victoria Station, and its population had been largely augmented of late years by the families of a number of wealthy City men, who found they could combine fresh air with convenient proximity to their business by residing at Prior Common. Even before this commercial element had been introduced, the place had borne the reputation of being lively, pleasant and sociable. There were two or three fine old family places round about it, the finest of all being Dene Prior, the home of the Stanmers. There were also many good old houses that were well occupied, though they could not aspire to be called "places." As was fitting, Mr. Warrener, as the rector of Prior Common, knew every one; he and his family visited and were visited by all the people who had "places," by the rich, luxurious-living commercial magnates, and by the large and important faction who lived at ease and in excellent style in houses that were not "places." In such a society it was impossible that Mr. Stanmer and Belle could avoid frequent meetings. But these meetings soon ceased to cause the young squire's anxious mother any alarm. Arthur no longer singled Belle out to be the recipient of the greater part of his quiet earnest attentions, and Belle no longer sparkled up in joyful anticipation of receiving them whenever they met as she had been wont to do. *Something* had come between them, but what it was Mrs. Stanmer could not determine, only she was a woman of quick perceptions in spite of her languid indolent manner, and she dated the change in her son from the day on which she had pointed out to him Belle Warrener in the act of jumping over the hedge into the water-meadow.

As for Belle, her nerves had received such a shock that day in the cattle shed that it was a long time before she ceased to start at shadows by day, or lie awake at night with her heart thumping nearly out of her breast at every chance noise. She seemed to herself to be enveloped in a horrible veil of secrecy,

which might be rent asunder and she disgraced and put to open shame at any moment. There had been a small fuss made and a gentle court of inquiry opened when the chicken and quart bottle of ale had first been missed, and she had let the opportunity slip of making confession to her father and step-mother. Not that she stood in fear, or had any cause to stand in fear, of either of them. But she was too much ashamed of the termination of her outbreak of charity to bear to touch upon the subject. It seemed to her that the tramp's kisses and hateful embraces had defiled her, and she could not endure the idea of being known to be a defiled thing by her father and his wife. It was bad enough, miserably, crushingly bad enough, to have been revealed in the ghastly way she had been to Arthur Stanmer. Her health gave way under the strain, and for a long time she laboured under the appalling dread that some clear-sighted doctor would be called in who would discern that shame and remorse were at the bottom of her malady. In fact, poor girl, she exaggerated her own folly until it assumed the dimensions of a crime, and permitted it to crush a good large portion of youth and happiness out of her.

Her dejected air, her lowered physique, her nervous manner were observed and commented upon, as they could scarcely fail to be, by many of her associates and acquaintances in the friendly self-satisfied community of Prior Common. Some people said she was fretting because Mr. Stanmer had "cooled off," "which," they added, "any one might have felt sure he would do as soon as he found out that there was not much in Miss Warrener beyond her pretty face and figure." Others declared with vehemence that Mr. Stanmer never had admired her, and had grown quite disgusted when he discovered that she was mistaking his friendship for her father for a deeper feeling for her frivolous young self. Some few averred with bated breath that she had formed an attachment to the dancing master who gave lessons at the school which she had only left a year ago. But no one, with the exception of the young squire of Dene Prior, suspected that she was feeling herself to be a social leper because she had been kissed by the handsome tramp, for whom she had robbed her step-mother's larder, and whom she had with fatal friendliness addressed as "Dick."

CHAPTER II.

A CHANGE NEEDED.

"I AM sure our Belle wants change of air and society," Mrs. Warrener said to her husband, when about twelve months had passed since the cattle shed incident, and Belle's health and spirits continued in an unfavourable state.

"She has plenty of society, and where could she go for better air than we have here? I don't see that she needs any change."

Mr. Warrener was busy making notes for his next Sunday morning's sermon; experience ought to have taught his wife that she could not have chosen a more inauspicious time for mooted domestic matters.

"She's not like the same girl who came home to us two years ago; all her brightness seems gone. Mrs. Stanmer was saying yesterday that Belle looked more like thirty than twenty."

The rector put down his pen and looked over his spectacles at his wife.

"Now you speak of it, I see Belle is much more subdued and quiet in speech and manner than when she came home, but that's only the natural difference between eighteen and twenty. Belle has put away childish things, that is all, my dear."

"Belle is either in bad health or bad spirits, and I should like to send her away for a change," Mrs. Warrener persisted, and then, as he could not get on with his sermon while she stood there, Mr. Warrener agreed that his wife should speak to Belle and, if possible, get at the girl's wishes relative to a short absence from home.

A very good understanding and thoroughly friendly relations had always existed between Mrs. Warrener and her step-daughter. The one had never assumed undue authority, and the other had never found the step-maternal rule anything but gentle, easy and sympathetic. But lately there had not been the same absolute freedom in the intercourse between them. Mrs. Warrener found herself checked in the discussion of many of the topics that most naturally offered themselves for their consideration. The Stanmers had always been amongst the most intimate

friends of the Warreners. But now Belle received any mention of the names of either mother or son with chilling silence, or a curt conclusive remark. The sight of a beggar at their gates irritated her instead of rousing her pity, and she struck against taking any walking exercise beyond the walls of their own gardens.

Consequently it frequently happened that the two ladies would sit for many hours together of an evening working in silence, because Belle refused to respond when Mrs. Warrener would broach the subject of the Stanmers' doings at Dene Prior, and assume an air of stony indifference if her step-mother described the incidents of her daily walks to the village, which always took her through the water-meadow where the cattle shed was. The girl was always ready to drive Mrs. Warrener out in their smart little pony carriage, or to ride any distance on her fast-trotting mare, Flight, or to take the train to town and get through any amount of household shopping. But she shrank from walking about in the really charming region which surrounded the Rectory, in a way that was incomprehensible to every one who remembered what a frequent wayside object she had been for some time after her return from school.

On the evening of the day on which Mrs. Warrener had opened the subject to her husband, she approached it with Belle. They were sitting, as was their habit of a summer evening when they were alone, under the verandah outside the drawing-room windows: Mrs. Warrener with a piece of white linen which she was embroidering into a tea table-cloth in her hand, and Belle with a book on her lap as an excuse for silence, if silence should seem desirable to her.

With an effort for which she could not account, Mrs. Warrener broke the ice.

"Belle, dear," she said, "I called at Dene Prior, as you know, yesterday, and something Mrs. Stanmer said made me determine to speak to your father about your having a change."

"What could Mrs. Stanmer find to say about me?" Belle asked quickly, with a crimsoning face. She had that intuitive feeling which many girls have against the interference of the mothers of the men with whom they (the girls) are in love, more especially when, as in this case, there exists a strong suspicion on the girl's part that she would not be the mother's choice. Belle

admitted to herself that Mr. Stanmer had been perfectly justified in cooling off from her after what he had seen. But she had a shrewd conviction that his mother had watered and fertilized the seeds of that coolness, and she did not love Mrs. Stanmer more than might be expected under these circumstances.

"She only said that you were not looking well, and that you had altered a good deal since you came home."

"She used to call me a tom-boy," Belle said quickly. "It didn't seem to please her when I was that—or when she said I was. What fault does she find with me now?"

"No fault, my dear child. She spoke quite feelingly about this place being rather dull for a young girl like you, and said how good a change would be for you."

"I should like a change," Belle sighed. "Where can I go?"

"My sister, Mrs. Gould, would be delighted to have you a few weeks, I know. You have never seen her since you were a child."

"I remember her. She was at your wedding, and she was very pretty," Belle interrupted. "Why has she never come here since?"

"She lost her husband soon after I married, and took her children to Brussels to educate. Now they are grown up, and she has come back and taken a house in London. It may not be very gay, because she doesn't know many people yet, but you'll have young companionship, change of scene and air."

"And change of thought. I've not had much to think about during the last year, excepting myself. Thank you, dear mother."

As she said the last words, Belle sprang up with something of her old blitheness and kissed her step-mother warmly.

"Why, that's like my own dear Belle! Mrs. Stanmer wouldn't say if she could see you now that you look more like thirty than twenty."

"Did she say I looked that?"

"She said it very kindly, dear."

Already Mrs. Warrener was repenting herself of having made this last confidence, as Belle was evidently not exactly pleased.

"Said it more in sorrow than in anger, in fact. Was Mr. Stanmer there at the time?"

"He was, and he wouldn't agree with his mother a bit, though

she appealed to him. In fact, he said your face had gained in expression, and that expression was more fascinating than mere youthful beauty."

"How good of him. He spoke of me as quite an old stager too, though not precisely in his mother's sledge-hammer style. Ah, well!"

"My dear Belle, don't sigh over such a trifle. Mrs. Stanmer didn't mean it, she *couldn't* have meant it, for you don't look a day more than your age when you brighten up."

"And as I only brighten up about once in a blue moon, I suppose I do look very venerable at other times. Mrs. Stanmer is like my looking-glass; that tells me the same truth, only I don't like to believe it."

"I will go up to-morrow and see my sister," Mrs. Warrener said, rising up; "and now I will go and tell your father that we have talked it over, and that it is settled that you shall pay Mrs. Gould a visit."

The kind lady busied herself for a few moments in collecting and putting away her work materials, and then bustled away cheerfully to report progress to her husband, who sat silent and solitary thinking.

* * * * *

In spite of his having held aloof from her, and of her having even more pointedly held aloof from him, Belle had never quite lost her belief in his being her lover still. It might be that he would never tell her so, in which case she would live and die an old maid. But that she still had the power to divert his attention to herself from every other person in the room, had been made manifest to her more than once lately. She knew without looking at him that he looked uneasy when she either tried to avoid him or seemed to be pleased or amused by any one else. Sometimes she would turn suddenly and find him looking at her with all the old fondness with which she was so familiar, and with a something stronger and sadder, that might be deeper passion, but that "probably," she thought, "was a fixed resolve to have nothing more to do with her, in spite of his infatuation."

"What will he think now when he hears I am really going away?" she asked herself, as she sat there in the twilight softly pulling a branch of lemon-scented verbena through her hand.

What will he think? What will he say? What will he do? These are the questions that the majority of women spend their youth in asking, about men who are more or less undeserving of the time and trouble the questioners are expending upon them. Not only indeed is it their "youth" that the majority trifle away in this manner, but their maturity, their second summer, and even their old age. In fact, woman is never either too young or too old to be indifferent to the possibility of swaying the soul and touching the taste of some man. He may be a lover or husband, he may be a brother, cousin, uncle, or even grandfather (he generally has large means at his own disposal in the two last cases), or he may be that most elastic and dangerous of all, "a friend." But in each and every case he is the one being in the world whose thoughts, words and actions are omnipotent with the individual woman who serves him for either love or lucre.

Presently, while she was picturing to herself how he would look when she met him the next time and told him that she was going away for an indefinite time, she heard her step-mother's voice in the hall saying:

"Go through the drawing-room. You'll find Belle in the verandah; and I'll join you in a few minutes. Belle and I have just arranged about her going away so pleasantly."

"Belle going away!"

Belle had only time to note with keen pleasure what a ring there was of pain and disappointment in the tone in which these few words were said, before the one who said them was stepping through the French window, coming in the old familiar way uninvited of an evening, the way to which Belle had been accustomed from her childhood, the way in which Arthur Stanmer had not come for many a long month.

"Mrs. Warrener told me where to find you," he began, seating himself in the chair Mrs. Warrener had lately filled; "and she told me something else, too, Belle—that you are going away."

"I hope I am," she answered rather coolly, the more coolly because she was trying to quiet the throbs of unreasonable happiness which were convulsing her.

"Going away! and glad of it! Why?"

"Why? Well, partly because Mrs. Warrener and papa are the most unselfish people in the world, and so they want to give me all the pleasure they can, and partly——" She checked herself

quietly, and then added, "But I needn't give you any more reasons for my departure. I am *going!* Rejoice with me over the fact."

"Doesn't it occur to you that you will be missed most frightfully? Mrs. Warrener is dear and unselfish, but how will she get on without you? She was saying to my mother yesterday that there has never been an hour since she married your father when the sight of you hasn't given her happiness. And there are others who feel the same about you, though they haven't been able to say it yet."

"Can't say it for reasons which might not be pleasant for me to hear?" she questioned, thinking of that humiliating scene in the water-meadow.

He nodded his head slowly in assent. His thoughts were far enough from the water-meadow and the handsome tramp who had been the principal figure in the little play which had been acted there. But, unfortunately, Belle did not grasp this fact, and so froze him effectually by saying:

"They have lighted the lamps in the drawing-room—shall we go in? I am longing to talk to mother and father about my visit to town; it will make it seem such a more settled thing when we've talked it over well. I shall think of nothing else till I go."

"I came intending to tell you something which I don't think you would care to hear now," he said rather lamely, following Belle into the drawing-room, where she was already engaged in putting lamps in convenient places for her father and mother.

She paused for a moment with a bowl of roses which she was conveying from one table to another in her hands, and looked at him piteously.

"Don't tell me anything that would hurt me, and that I *can't help now,*" she said pleadingly; "it was all a mistake, *such* a mistake. I wish you would forget it, and let me try to forget it too."

She thought he meant to refer to the tramp incident, and he thought she meant to refer to his own love for her. There was no opportunity for a clear understanding to be arrived at, for at the moment Mr. Warrener came in clamouring for the evening paper, and his wife began enlarging on the expediency of her sending off a sixpenny telegram to her sister, Mrs. Gould, the

first thing in the morning. When Belle went to the study to look for a telegraph form, Mr. Stanmer said hesitatingly :

"Is Belle so anxious to get away that you need wire to your sister?"

Mrs. Warrener laughed quietly.

"My sister is a dear woman, a fond mother, an affectionate sister and a splendid friend. But she has what we women call 'little fads.' When she does a thing she likes to have a fuss made about her if the thing she does succeeds. Perhaps there may be a little bit of selfishness in her nature, but it's a gracious, nicely-bred selfishness. When once she knows Belle she will love our Belle for herself. But at starting, Mrs. Gould will like Belle all the better if there's a little fuss made, so that Mrs. Gould's action may stand forth all the more prominently. And it will be such a charming change for Belle," Mrs. Warrener continued apologetically. "Mrs. Gould is going to make her home very lively for her young people. She will often give little dances, and take them about to theatres and things of that sort."

"Belle likes the prospect?"

"Of course she does," Mrs. Warrener whispered, as Belle came back into the room with the telegram form, and the fixed determination not to let Arthur Stanmer know how she hated these plans which were being made for her removal from his vicinity. Soon after this he took his leave, for it was not like old times. Belle was not ready to go to the piano and play softly to him as he stood over her, while the elders read and dozed in the distance.

CHAPTER III.

ROSE DAVENPORT.

ALL through the night before her departure, up to the very moment of her stepping into the pony carriage that was to take her to the station, Belle nursed the hope that Arthur Stanmer would come and say good-bye to her.

A fortnight had passed since that day on which it had first been proposed that Belle should go up and pay a visit to Mrs. Warrener's sister, the well-off widow, Mrs. Gould. There had been one or two hitches in the arrangements, owing to Mrs. Gould's house being full at the time Belle was proposed to her as

a guest in the first place. Afterwards Belle's dressmaker played her false about the delivery of certain garments which were deemed essential to her well-being on her introduction to her almost unknown hostess. During this fortnight she had played the game of "he will come!" "he wont!" a countless number of times by herself. He did not come; and then she wrote herself down an ass for having played the game.

It had not occurred to her that she was responsible for this expressed coldness on his part. He had called at the Rectory that evening with his head and heart full of renewed love and fear for her in consequence of a discovery which had just been sprung upon him. He had gone with the intention of asking her to give him the right to protect her from any danger or annoyance that might arise for her in the future. And he had been met with coldness by herself, and with the uncomplimentary assurance from Mrs. Warrener that Belle "was glad to go away for a change."

It was true that the fact of her going away would put her out of reach of a possible annoyance which menaced her if she remained at home just now. But, on the other hand, he felt sure that if she would intrust herself to him entirely he would be well able to avert this annoyance from her. He happened, unfortunately for his immediate success with Belle, to be an extremely sensitive man. This quality of sensitiveness is by some people supposed to be allied generally to a diffident and almost humble-minded nature. My own experience is that it is the inseparable ally of that pride which goeth before a fall, and a thoroughly well-conceived idea of the sensitive one's own importance.

Mr. Stanmer left the Rectory that night with the firm impression that Belle was too frivolous, or too faulty—he was not quite sure which it was—to appreciate the depth of that devotion which had made him swallow the bitter pill of the cattle shed incident, and "come after her" (as the domestics phrased it) again. That she should have been cool to him just at first would only have struck him as being rather delicate-minded on her part, considering what she *must fear* his opinion of her must be. It was the statement that she "liked the prospect of going away" out of his reach, taken in conjunction with her coolness, that hurt and alternately chilled and fevered him as he walked home.

It was evidently designed by over-ruling fate that his ways should not be those of pleasantness this day. As soon as he reached Dene Prior he was met by the announcement that a clerk from the office of Jarvis and Blake, the family solicitors, was waiting to see him.

"He had better have some supper and make up his mind to sleep here; you look after him, Walters," Mr. Stanmer said to the butler on receipt of the news of this legal visitor. The clerk, however, refused the supper and declined to sleep there. His orders were stringent. He must take a written reply from Mr. Stanmer to a sealed document, which he handed to that gentleman, back to Mr. Jarvis that night.

Mr. Stanmer opened and began to read it with a slightly derisive smile at the much ado about nothing which lawyers were apt to make. Before he had read the second paragraph the derisive smile had vanished.

The written answer which the clerk took back was to this effect :

"I shall be with you at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and shall deal with the claim as the villainous fraud it is."

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock that night before Mr. Stanmer found his way to the drawing-room, where his mother always stayed when he was at home until he came to bid her good-night. Her usual hour for going to bed when they had no visitors at Dene Prior was half-past ten, and Arthur rarely caused her to overstay her time by neglecting to come in earlier. Luckily on this occasion she was following the monotonous but intensely interestingly-told fortunes of some of Rhoda Broughton's latest creations, and so had omitted to feel either fatigued or neglected—until her son came in with an apology, which made her feel both with promptitude.

"Is it to-morrow morning, or only the middle of the night, my dear Arthur?" she asked languidly, half closing her eyes with reproachful weariness. She guessed that he had been to the Rectory, and erroneously took it for granted that he had only just returned from that dangerous precinct. She had never liked to think of Belle as her future daughter-in-law, and lately she had nourished other and far more magnificent views for her son. Accordingly now she rendered fatigue endured in a maternally self-sacrificial spirit very touchingly.

"It's only the sober hour of eleven; I am afraid you have found your book dull, mother," he said kindly, moving the little silk pillow into a more comfortable position under her head, and drawing the sofa rug more smoothly over her, as he spoke. He was always wont to pay her these little attentions; she took them as her right, her due, and it seemed to her that only "a perfect woman nobly planned" would be endurable as Arthur's wife should she ever dare to share these attentions with Arthur's mother.

"My book has interested me in exact proportion to your neglect of me; between the two I have been led into such forgetfulness of myself that I shall probably have to pay a severe penalty in the form of having to stay in bed half the day tomorrow. How were the Rectory people?"

"They're all right."

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to the Rectory to-night? I wanted to send an eye-infirmity ticket to Mr. Warrener and a new Mount Mellick stitch to his wife. Oh! to be sure too, I should have asked you to inquire if Mrs. Warrener has acted on my advice and arranged to send that lackadaisical girl from home, where she's idling her life away, to some place where she will have to bestir herself and live usefully."

"You can't mean Belle when you speak of a lackadaisical girl? but I can tell you that she is going away to stay with an aunt in town."

"Poor aunt! However, as I don't know the lady I can only say I am very glad. It will be an intense relief to Mrs. Warrener to be rid for a time of the perpetual sight of that discontent and modern-day weariness which Miss Belle has been affecting for the last few months."

"Belle would never 'affect' anything. She's quieter undoubtedly than she was in the days when you called her a tomboy, but she doesn't strike me as being either discontented or weary."

"Then she's love-sick, and if that's the case, who is the man, Arthur? I won't flatter you by supposing that *you* are the object of her secret sighs. But putting you out of the question, on what other man can she have been bestowing her unrequited affection?"

"I am not in her confidence."

"You speak as if you would wish to be and were rather hurt at not being."

"I speak as I feel," he replied sharply. "Now, mother, it's no use beating about the bush. I'll come straight to the heart of the matter and tell you honestly, I'm as fond of Belle as ever I was, but she holds me at arm's-length. Let us drop the subject now, we are not likely to agree upon it——"

"Holds you at arm's-length, does she? then there *is* another man!" Mrs. Stanmer said animatedly, rising into a sitting position. "I wish the dear girl would confide in me; I would ask 'him,' *whoever* he is, to meet her and give them opportunities of arriving at a fair understanding."

"Regardless of my feelings?" he asked jestingly, but with an uncontrollable amount of earnestness in the jest.

"Your feelings, dear Arthur! as if I were not quite assured that they are not seriously engaged; if they had been you would have settled the matter long ago. No, dear boy, I am not regardless of your feelings, but I want you to keep them in order for awhile——"

"You mean until Miss Davenport has been here?"

"Exactly; until you have had an opportunity of seeing a good deal of one of the sweetest girls I ever knew, your young cousin, Rose Davenport."

"Cousin! her mother's uncle married your mother's aunt. It's clever of you to trace the relationship, my dear mother."

"Her father has twenty thousand a year to leave—if she pleases him—to his only child. That's a good clue to lead one through the mazes of an even more intricate relationship than ours with the Davenports," Mrs. Stanmer said drily. Then she rose from her sofa, and was kissing her son's forehead and saying good-night to him, when he startled her by asking:

"Can you give me any clue to the relationship that may possibly exist between ourselves and a man called Ogilvie?"

"As you know, your father's name was 'Ogilvie' until he changed it to 'Stanmer' on inheriting this property."

"My father was an only son?"

"He was an only child, so was his father before him, and his grandfather was an only son, but *he* had sisters. Why do you ask?"

"The name cropped up to-day, and it struck me that perhaps

the owner of it might be of kin to me in some remote degree. Good-night, my dear mother; my conscience will feel clearer if you get to your room before midnight."

"Have you met an Ogilvie to-day? How very odd. Now, I have never happened to meet any one of the name, for of course your poor father had changed it long before I married him."

"I haven't exactly 'met' an Ogilvie in your sense of the word, but a man of that name called here as a traveller for a firm of wine merchants this morning, and I was rather struck by his appearance."

"Oh, a 'traveller' only. Good-night, again, dear Arthur. Your evenings at home will be made ever so much more attractive to you when Rose Davenport comes."

Left to himself, Mr. Stanmer went back to his smoking-room, and there, pipe in mouth, he pondered over many things, but Rose Davenport was not one of them. Important as the information was which he had received from his lawyers that evening, he could not concentrate his mind on that business solely. His thoughts would veer round to the "man called Ogilvie," who had called at Dene Prior in the wine merchants' interest that day.

"I can swear it's the same fellow. Yet he would hardly have the audacity to call here and face me," he said to himself at last, as he went away to bed, chiefly because he was too nervously excited to do anything that could justify him in sitting up any longer. "Odd that the name should have been brought under my notice for the first time for years from two such different sources on the same day."

During the ensuing fortnight the name of Ogilvie was brought under his notice pretty often. But it was by the legal firm of Jarvis and Blake, and not by the wine merchants' traveller.

* * * * *

The down train from Victoria was just in as Mrs. and Miss Warrener walked on to the platform, and Belle had just time to observe that the Dene Prior carriage was waiting in the road outside the station, when her attention was diverted from this circumstance by the sight of a striking-looking girl, who stepped out of a first-class carriage.

Looking taller than she really was by reason of the admirably erect and graceful way in which she carried herself, the young

lady commanded the attention of the limited staff of station officials at once. Without being beautiful, her pretty little sleek, dark-haired head, and the low brow which surmounted her soft dark eyes and delicately-shaped oval face, attracted quite as much admiration from men as was gained by any more brilliantly-coloured women who ever crossed her path and, weakly, sought to rival her.

It was borne in upon the minds of the least-observant among the spectators as she stepped out on to the platform that this girl was excellently well-dressed, yet not a man present could have said what she had on, or how the effect was produced. But Belle Warrener took keen note at once of the fineness of the greyish-blue summer cloth of which the plain, well-gored skirt and little three-caped mantle, which barely reached to the girl's slim waist, was made. Round the bottom of the skirt and on each cape were three rows of a darker shade of grey-blue braid. The neat, well-fitting hat was of velvet, of the same tint as the dress, with a band and wing of the darker shade. As she walked along it could be seen that her well-balanced boots were not only high-heeled but high-legged, cut to her shapely limbs as closely and easily as was her skin. Her gloves, too, of the palest tan. "Look! what a shape they give her wrists," Belle whispered half-enviously as the girl put her hand out to clutch at the head of a handsome red Irish terrier, who was just let loose from the dog-box, and who responded to her attentions with genial warmth when she addressed him as her "dearest Tim."

The up-train was panting into the station by this time, and Belle had to tear her eyes from the stranger and look to her own belongings. So she was spared the sight of that stranger's departure from the station in the Stanmers' landau, with Mr. Stanmer riding by her side.

Nevertheless, it worried Belle that the vision of this girl in her well-dressed attractiveness should obtrude itself perpetually upon her whenever, in the course of the next few days, she thought of home, the little railway station where she had parted with her step-mother, or—Arthur Stanmer.

As for Mr. Stanmer himself, he could not have taken his oath whether it was the wish to see the last of Belle or the first of Rose Davenport which had taken him to the station that morning.

CHAPTER IV.

LUCKY SYLVIA.

IT was twelve o'clock, not a propitious hour at which to arrive at a strange house among strange people, when Belle reached No. 10, Blessington Terrace, where Mrs. Gould had established herself and her household gods. Outwardly, No. 10 was like all its brethren in the terrace; but inwardly it differed from every one of them, for Mrs. Gould had brought her own antique Belgian furniture and fixed ideas with her for its adornment.

The long entrance passage, terminating in the front staircase and the door which led to the back and underground portions of the house, seemed to have its borders widened instead of narrowed by the low, long black oak settees and tables, the former upholstered in deeply-stamped leather, about which the aroma of the middle ages still hung, which were ranged on either side. There was nothing lugged in from "far Japan," regardless of congruity, in this passage. Tokio and Bruges had not got mixed.

"Mrs. Gould had gone out shopping, but had left word that she would be back to luncheon at half-past one, and meanwhile she hoped Miss Warrener would make herself at home," a neat parlour-maid told Belle, who attempted to obey the injunction by asking:

"Are the Miss Goulds at home? If they are, will you tell them that I am here."

"Miss Gould is out shopping with her mamma, and Miss Sylvia doesn't like to be disturbed when she's studying. Will you like to go up to your room, now, miss, or will you wait in the drawing-room till Mrs. Gould ——"

"I will go out and walk about for an hour," Belle interrupted, wheeling round abruptly in a checked and repelled, but far from a chastened spirit. "Tell Mrs. Gould not to think I'm lost if I am not in to luncheon. I shall walk about till I have got friends with the neighbourhood."

"There's not much to see, miss, close round here, unless you can get as far as High Street—the shops there are lovely——" the servant was beginning as she held the door open for Miss Warrener to pass out again, when she was interrupted by the sound of fleet footsteps scuttling over the stairs, and a voice crying out:

"Simmonds, why didn't you come and tell me Miss Warrener was here? If I hadn't run out to listen when I heard the visitor's knock, I shouldn't have known you were come," the speaker added frankly, as she turned a smiling, honest young face and extended a rather sopped-looking puny hand to Belle.

"I'm Sylvia," she went on, rushing her words out tumultuously. "I can't stay to say much more now because I've left Bubble in the bath, and I have to dry him and clean out the bath before mother comes home. She's so silly, you know; she doesn't like Bubble and Squeak being bathed in the bath that we all use."

"Shall I come and help you to dry him?" Belle asked, moved by a sudden impulse to sympathize with somebody.

"Oh, do! *do!*" Sylvia said earnestly, "and if you help, we may put Squeak in and polish him off as well before mother comes back. Take off your hat. Simmonds, get an apron for Miss Warrener, and burn some ribbon of Bruges in the hall so that mother won't smell the carbolic soap-suds when she comes in. You see it's like this," she added to Belle as she led the way upstairs; "poor Bubble and Squeak belong to my old self and the man who gave them to me, and mother doesn't like them now that I belong to Mr. Christopher and a fashionable future."

"I don't understand," Belle said quietly. There was something emotional as well as frivolous in Sylvia's manner, and Belle, having already taken a liking to the girl, wished to tone her down pleasantly.

"Don't you understand?" Sylvia cried, dropping on her knees by the side of a bath in which a white bull-terrier was cowering, held down by the hands of a housemaid who hated the job.

"Well, listen; I'll tell you the story of it all while I'm drying Bubble. My sister Lily is ever so much older and ever so much prettier than I am, you know."

She lifted a fair childish face, crowned by a crop of copper-coloured hair, up for Belle's inspection as she spoke, working away vigorously at her task of drying the dog the while.

"Older and prettier than you. Yes; go on."

"Well, I am only nineteen now, and when I was eighteen we were living in Brussels, and it was too cold for me and I got ill, and mother got frightened and sent me over to London to board with an old lady she knew of, who took boarders and lived in

Gower Street. Well, this old lady had a son, and he gave me these bull-terriers, Bubble and Squeak, and —I liked him you know.”

“Yes, and afterwards?”

Sylvia laughed pitifully.

“Well, afterwards! I went back to Brussels, and mother wouldn't hear of my knowing anything more of the Ogilvies. She wrote to the poor old lady and said the acquaintance must cease, and she made me vow that I would never speak to, write to, or hear from Dick again—What's the matter?”

“I don't know,” Belle said, panting—the name of “Dick” still thrilled her painfully. “Go on.”

“There's not much more to 'go on' about,” Sylvia said pettishly, squatting down on her heels and pushing the nearly dry Bubble away from her. “Ann, go and get Squeak; Miss Warrener will help me to wash him, I know, and so you can go on with your work; it's a shame the way I take you from it, I know, Ann; but what would become of the dogs if you didn't help me to look after them?”

“Do be tidy, Miss Sylvia, by the time your mamma comes in. I'll wash Squeak. Mr. Christopher's coming to luncheon, you know.”

“So he is! I had forgotten,” Sylvia cried, starting up at once. “Oh! Ann, *do* wash Squeak for me, like the angel you are, and I'll go and groom myself nicely. Come with me, Belle, and I'll tell you all there is to tell about Mr. Christopher.”

She took Belle by the wrist as she spoke, and led the way to her own room, where she reduced her pretty hair to order and removed all traces of dogginess from her hands. While she was doing these things she revealed a bit more of herself to Belle.

“I don't know where or how mother met Mr. Christopher first, but directly she did meet him she made up her mind that he would be just the match for Lily. He is very rich, he is very liberal, and he's very stupid. He must be stupid because, though he might have had Lily, he chose me, and mother told me that she has nothing to leave us when she dies, and that if one of us didn't settle well soon and be able to look after the other, it would break her heart. So I am to be Mrs. Christopher and look after Lily.” She broke out into a laugh for a moment, and Belle took the opportunity of asking :

"And what is Mr. Christopher like?"

"Haven't I told you?" Sylvia said impatiently; "he's rich, liberal and stupid. Don't let us talk about him. I want to tell you about Dick Ogilvie; I daren't speak about him to mother or Lily, because they always look as if they thought me depraved when I do, and Bubble and Squeak, though they're affectionate, clever beasts, don't quite understand, so I've had to fall back upon old Ann. But I feel that I can trust you, so I'll tell you all—Oh! there's the luncheon bell. *That* means Mr. Christopher has arrived. Do I look as if I was going to meet my lover? Do I look happy?"

Tears were in her eyes, her lips were quivering. A word of sympathy would have broken her down, so Belle refrained from uttering it.

"You look as nice as any girl need look in everyday life, and you look as happy as a girl ought to feel who has two white bull-terriers and a rich and liberal Mr. Christopher. Now *I* am really justified in feeling a bit nervous. I'm dusty, I know I am, it's no use your saying I am not, and some of the starch has come out of my collar, it's not nearly as stiff as when I started."

"You only want to get off saying what you think about me by pretending to be nervous and talking nonsense about your collar. We must go down now, but never mind, I'll tell you all about Dick Ogilvie by-and-bye, when Mr. Christopher is gone. I'll show you his photograph too; when you see it you won't wonder that I've not gone crazy about him."

She sank her voice to a whisper as she said the last words, for they had reached the dining-room door. Then drawing herself up with all the dignity her little figure was capable of expressing, she walked in, saying:

"Pray excuse me for being late, mamma, and let me introduce Belle Warrenner; I have been getting acquainted with her, and forgot how time was going. Good morning, Mr. Christopher."

It was amusing and pathetic at the same time to see the little air of being a composed, slightly-bored young woman of the world. It was so obviously an effort made to conceal the nervous distaste which she felt for her betrothed. However, he was, as she had said, stupid, and so he saw nothing repellent in her demeanour. All he observed was that she had not got on

the huge half-hoop of diamonds and sapphires which he had given her as a pledge of affection.

"Good morning, Sylvia," he said gravely, coming slowly round the table in order to bestow an embrace, which all her ingenuity was powerless to avert whenever they met. He was a tall, short-throated, awkward-shouldered man, whose features seemed to be running into each other. What hair he had was weak and thin, sandy in colour, and badly cut. The whites of his faded blue eyes were of a yellowish tinge. His hands were large, but conveyed no sense of power, and his voice wandered about into several keys in the course of the shortest sentence. When he was mirthful he squeaked weakly. When he desired to impress his hearers, the sounds seemed to come from his boots, they were so harsh and hollow. But such as he was, he was evidently very precious in the sight of Mrs. Gould.

That lady meantime had embraced Belle heartily, and given her a rapturously warm welcome, and had then handed her over to Lily and straightway forgotten all about her. Mrs. Gould had a way of forgetting people who were not contributing to her current keenest interests. She was a woman of moderate means and many ambitions. To marry her daughters to men of wealth and position was the strongest of these, and up to the present time she had been unsuccessful, as far as Lily was concerned. Lily's claims, as the eldest, were paramount in her mother's eyes, and when Mr. Christopher had neglected the opportunities that were given him of plucking that fair flower, Mrs. Gould repented herself bitterly of the improvidence of which she had been guilty in coming to London, when she could have lived at half the price in Brussels, and made Lily feel that she was an ungrateful, undutiful and altogether superfluous person. But presently she found herself reinstated in her mother's affections by means of Sylvia's unconsciously exercised attractions for Mr. Christopher. That gentleman had passed the exquisitely-dressed beauty by with indifference. But the first time he saw Sylvia, who was still kept in a moral corner on account of the Dick Ogilvie episode, he gaped at her with such open-mouthed, though mute admiration, that Mrs. Gould resolved to forego her intention of subletting her house, and gave her youngest daughter three or four frocks from Lily's dressmaker.

The beauty, apathy and amiability of Lily were things that

were patent at first sight to the least observant of those who came in contact with her. She was a fair edition of her fair younger sister. The pallor of her face was not the pallor of sickness. Her skin was as clear, colourless, and free from spot or blemish as a white azalea petal. Her smile was sweet, and though she smiled often, she did not smile too much. Her hair was pale gold, soft and fine, and it had that large natural wave in it which no artificial means can produce. She was never out of temper, she was never unkind, or irritable, or despondent, or impatient. She took things as they came, with a sweet serenity that kept her skin unwrinkled. She put her clothes on admirably, and never troubled herself as to whether or not her mother had to cramp herself in order to pay for them. If Mr. Christopher had asked her, she would have become his wife without a moment's hesitation or a single qualm. She would never have said he was stupid, even had she thought it. She would never have tried to avert a legitimate embrace from the man she had promised to marry; perhaps she would even have felt a certain placid pleasure in making such an uninteresting and colourless life as Mr. Christopher's a shade or two brighter. As Mr. Christopher had not asked her to be his wife, she was perfectly contented to accept him as her future brother-in-law. She had no thought of, consequently no fears for, her future, such as those which continually assailed her more excitable mother. In all her young life she had never risen to the heights of being sanguine about anything. Consequently, when anything failed to come about, she was not disappointed. Good digestion invariably waited on her appetite, and flawless health on both. Her nerves never troubled her, and she was always quite as ready to stay at home and sit in a comfortable chair with a book or a piece of needlework that need not be finished soon, as she was to go to "At Homes" and dances, the theatre or flower shows. All her acquaintances of both sexes had good words to say of Lily Gould, for she was never jealous of the women or exacting towards the men. If a rival beauty cut Lily out with some eligible man, the rival beauty's triumph was robbed of its chiefest charm, shorn of its crowning glory, by reason of Lily's sweet, natural, good-tempered, absolute indifference to the fact. She had never made a pet of dog, cat or bird; but she was not vexed in the slightest degree when Bubble or Squeak defiled one of her

smartest frocks with their dirty paws. "Never mind! it will either wipe or wash off," she would say in answer to Sylvia's abject apologies. So it was with other things. She seemed to think that every one of life's troubles would either "wash or wipe off."

"Mr. Christopher has a most charming plan for us this afternoon," Mrs. Gould said, addressing Belle more especially; "he is going to take us all up the river, and we are to land at Richmond and dine. He is constantly giving us these pleasant little surprise treats—constantly," she added in an undertone to Belle. But Sylvia heard the whisper, and replied aggressively:

"There's not much of a 'surprise' about it when we all know of the invitation hours before; and there's nothing very novel about going on the river and dining at Richmond. Hundreds and thousands of people do it every summer."

"There are ways *and ways* of doing things," Mrs. Gould said hastily, noticing an ominous pucker about Mr. Christopher's ill-defined lips.

"I shall put on my blue cambric," Lily put in considerately. She really believed that they would all be glad to hear what she had decided on wearing, and to know that she would have no further trouble in the matter.

"Where is the ring, eh?" Mr. Christopher asked, picking up Sylvia's unadorned hand; and as the girl observed for the first time that she was without it, she exclaimed almost apologetically:

"Oh, dear! how stupid of me! I must have dropped it in Bubble's bath."

(*To be continued.*)

LONDON SOCIETY.

FEBRUARY, 1894.

A Bad Lot.*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER IV.

FIVE YEARS LATER.

IN the drawing-room of a certain house in Rutland Gate, one Monday afternoon in the month of October, a young man was standing with his back to a small fire and his coat-tails tucked up under his arms.

He faced two ladies, both of them elderly and both of them widows, one being his mother and the other an aunt, his late father's sister, who lived with her; and to them both he had just made a somewhat startling and disturbing announcement. He had told them briefly that he was engaged to be married—and to whom.

Such an announcement from the lips of an adult male being comes well within the ordinary laws of nature, and is but the prelude to a not uncommon incident of humanity; it is therefore somewhat curious that it should so often excite a large measure of painful and almost incredulous perturbation in the minds of his relations. In the present instance, the blank dismay of utter consternation had fallen like a pall upon the two women to whom the interesting communication had been made.

For the moment, however, no one of the three could utter a word, for the simple reason that, it being the hour of five-o'clock

tea, the footman had just entered the room and was laying out the teacups. They remained, therefore, in absolute silence, staring at each other.

But the very instant that the door had closed upon the departing man-servant, Mr. Cecil Roscoe, barrister-at-law, threw up his head and straightened himself, mentally and physically, for the fray.

"There is no reason," he said with some defiance, "no reason at all, why I should not marry whom I choose."

"It is a bitter disappointment to me, Cecil," said Mrs. Roscoe, his mother, with the deepest dejection.

Mrs. Torrens threw up her thin hands mutely, with a gesture of despair, and sighed.

The sigh exasperated him even more intensely than the remark.

"There is nothing to be melancholy about," resumed the young man, glaring almost fiercely at his aunt. "God bless my soul! one would think we were talking about a funeral instead of a wedding! I am the happiest man on earth since yesterday, and yet neither of you offer me one single word of congratulation."

"I had hoped so much, Cecil; I had believed that you would have married so well—and oh! so very differently. Of course, if you are happy——"

"Such happiness is certain to be short-lived," interrupted Mrs. Torrens, shaking her head sternly. "Think of it—a Forrester of Marshlands! What happiness can any man hope for out of such a connection as that?"

"Yet what on earth is there so very dreadful about the Forresters of Marshlands?" cried Cecil irritably. "I confess I cannot see why everybody is down on them. They are poor, it is true, but there is no disgrace in poverty. I do not want a rich wife. If she brings me not a sixpence, my dear girl, at least, is as thorough a lady as any duke's daughter in the land."

"My dear boy, you seem to have forgotten the story of her mother, that disgraceful and abandoned creature——"

"I have not been allowed to forget it," answered the young man with a short laugh; his fair, smooth-shaven face flushed suddenly. "I have been told it a dozen times. I know that Gordon Forrester, like many a better man, made a fool of himself

in early life, and married a burlesque actress, and that after a few years she left him. His youngest daughter was a baby of a few months old at the time. How can you suppose her to be responsible for what took place in her infancy? Why cannot an old story like that be wiped out and forgotten? I am not concerned with her mother—I am concerned with her."

"You seem to forget, Cecil, that we are expressly told on High Authority that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children—how much more, then, the sins of the mothers!"

"It is an infernal shame, then, whoever said it," muttered the young man, looking angrily down at his feet.

"Now you are blasphemous," said Mrs. Torrens severely. "There seems to be no religion amongst the young men of the present day, and I think no sense of propriety either, or it would not occur to you to mate with the daughter of a bad woman of low extraction. Remember that these things are in the blood, and reappear in families down to the third and fourth generations."

"I have not studied the theory of heredity, my dear aunt, but really I think your argument is beside the mark. I admit that the story of that unfortunate woman is an unhappy one, and is a disadvantage to her daughters—they are perhaps to be pitied—but I do not wish to dwell upon this. The girl I am going to marry is as good as she is lovely; it will be my duty and my joy to place her in happier surroundings. My dear mother, I look to you to be good to her."

Mrs. Roscoe was tearful; encounters between her son and her sister-in-law always made her nervous, for Mrs. Torrens was the wealthy member of the family. She was rich and childless, and it had always been Mrs. Roscoe's hope that Cecil might be her heir; yet he was everlastingly quarrelling with her—and now this terrible engagement to this undesirable girl! Would it not put the finishing touch to her displeasure?

"Dear Selina," she said, turning to the irascible old lady, who sat bolt upright at the edge of her chair, clothed in sable garments, with sharp, high features and small twinkling eyes, like a bird of ill-omen. "Cecil, I am sure, would like us to make the best of things, and if this young lady herself is really a good and modest girl, ought we not, perhaps, to lay aside some of our objections to her family?"

"Ah! but *is* she good? Girls have a way of appearing to be angels to the men who are in love with them. How are you to be an unprejudiced judge of what she really is? For how long have you known her, Cecil?"

"I have known her three weeks," answered the young man, flushing uneasily, for he was perhaps conscious that there were some very weak joints in his armour, or else why did he protest so much?

"Three weeks!" exclaimed his mother in horror, "and you actually propose to spend your life with a person you have only known three weeks? How can you take the most serious and solemn step in the whole of your career in this hasty and inconsidered fashion? My dear boy, I entreat you to reflect and pause before it is too late."

"My dearest mother, if I were to reflect and pause till I were grey-headed I could come to no other conclusion. I love Nell Forrester, and I am determined to marry her," replied Cecil, with a warmth which carried a sense of conviction of his earnestness to his hearers.

"But what sort of opportunity can you have had of knowing her? Where have you seen her? Where did you meet her?"

"I wish to have no concealment at all from you. I met her first at a ball. I went down to Fenchester to stay with Charley Drake in the 110th; his regiment is quartered there, and they were giving a dance. Drake and I were at Eton together; he is a good little fellow and we have always remained friends. He introduced me to Mr. Gordon Forrester and to his daughters; there are three of them, and Nell is the youngest."

"And I have heard from my friends the Stanfords, who live in that neighbourhood, that those girls are an actual byword in the county! They are fast and noisy, and their flirtations with the officers at the barracks are a positive disgrace. Nobody in Fenshire will know them, I hear."

"You have heard a somewhat exaggerated account, my dear aunt, of what is partially true about the two elder Miss Forresters. Dorothea and Millicent are frank open-hearted girls, whose spirits, I admit, occasionally run away with their discretion; they certainly do flirt with the young fellows quartered at Fenchester, and as they are full of fun and jokes they sometimes grow a little uproarious. But I could stake my existence that there is

not the smallest atom of harm in either of them. As to my girl, she is totally different to her elder sisters. She is sweet and gentle, as gay as a bird and as fresh as a flower, and I know instinctively that she is as good as gold. Afterwards—after the ball I mean—I went to the house. I saw her in her home more than once. I went down, as you know, into the country on Saturday, and I stayed at Marshlands until this morning. Yesterday, I asked her to be my wife and she accepted me. Now you have the whole story, my dear mother, and you too, Aunt Selina, although you are so hard on me. Do you suppose,” added the young man with a sudden earnestness, “do you suppose for one moment that I am such an ass as to wish to marry any but a true and good girl? If I thought there was anything against my dear Nell, if there were the faintest breath against her character, or the least approach to levity of thought or principle in her nature, dearly as I love her, I swear to you both that I would sever myself at once from her for ever, at whatever pain to myself. In these days of unhappy and ill-assorted marriages, when the divorce courts are crowded with applicants and the papers flooded with unsavoury details of a legion of domestic tragedies, all more or less disgraceful and nauseous, a man who has got common sense and common honesty is not such a fool as to take to himself a wife of whose moral rectitude he cannot be absolutely certain. I am in love with Nell Forrester, but even my love would not serve to blind me to any moral flaw, however minute, in her character, and I would cut myself off from her at once and for ever, should so terrible a revelation ever be made to me.”

“And yet you propose to marry a girl who three weeks ago was an utter stranger to you!” cried Mrs. Torrens scornfully.

“Pardon me, I propose to do nothing of the sort. I am, it is true, engaged to her after a three weeks’ acquaintance, and I have no shadow of doubt with regard to her; but if it were only to prove to you how truly I admire and trust her, I shall not think of becoming her husband without a deeper and fuller knowledge of her. If you wish me to do so, I will promise that our marriage shall not take place immediately. I have no desire to hurry matters on unduly. A few months more or less can make no difference to me; I shall only understand her more thoroughly, and we shall know each other more intimately, and

I venture to prophesy that the longer I know her the better I shall believe in her and trust her."

"Will you give us your word of honour, Cecil," cried his aunt eagerly, "that you will defer your marriage for some months? Let us say until Easter?"

Cecil turned to his mother.

"Would such a delay content you, mother? Would you be satisfied if I were to promise you not to be married till Easter?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear boy, it would be an unspeakable comfort to me to feel that you were not taking this step rashly and in ill-conditioned haste."

After a moment of silence, Cecil answered resolutely:

"Very well, then; I will promise. I will not be married until Easter."

"And between this and Easter," thought his mother with satisfaction, "all sorts of things might take place; all is perhaps not lost yet." Yet, although she endeavoured to glean some consolation out of this thought, it was perhaps one of the bitterest blows of her whole life that her son had just dealt to her.

Left a widow after a few years of married life, Mrs. Roscoe, although she was young enough to have made a second marriage, had determined to devote the rest of her life entirely to her only child. Cecil's career, both at school and at college, had left nothing to be desired, and when he subsequently chose the Bar as the profession he desired to enter, she had cheerfully given up her pretty house in the country in order to make a home for him in London. For so young a man, Cecil had been singularly fortunate, he had fallen on his legs at once, and after a very few years he had gathered together quite a respectable practice, so that he was at this time in receipt of a fair income and was practically independent of his mother. It was solely with a view to his ulterior benefit that, soon after settling in Rutland Gate, Mrs. Roscoe offered to join forces with her husband's widowed sister Mrs. Torrens, who was many years older than herself. Mrs. Torrens, as has been stated, was wealthy and childless, and she professed to take a keen interest in her nephew. It was, perhaps, the greatest mistake that Cecil's mother had ever made. Mrs. Torrens had not been long an inmate of their home before it became apparent that she and Cecil were keenly antipathetic.

She was narrow-minded and severe in her views, Cecil was obstinate in his own opinions and impatient of his aunt's interference. Still, for the sake of what she might eventually do for him, Mrs. Roscoe endeavoured to keep the peace and to promote a good understanding between her son and his aunt. She was often torn in two betwixt them, for if her affection went to her son, it is certain that her judgment often coincided with that of her sister-in-law.

It is not to be supposed that these two ladies, who, in spite of minor differences, both had Cecil's interest and advantage sincerely at heart, had not formed some plan together concerning that most momentous event of a man's life—his marriage.

The subject had been discussed over and over between them. They were in no hurry for him to make a home for himself—that he should marry before he was two or three and thirty did not seem to them to be wise or prudent; he was now only nine-and-twenty, in three or four years it would be time enough, they felt, that he should settle down; and it is perhaps quite needless to say that they had not only fixed upon the time, but also upon the lady whom he was to marry.

No heir to the throne was ever the object of more earnest and serious solicitude than was Cecil Roscoe in this respect. The girl whom they had selected to be his wife was one whom he had known all his life. Ida Vincent had been his playfellow ever since his schoolboy days—in old days the Vincents had been neighbours in the country, they lived now three doors off. Ida had come to spend the day with him often in the holidays, and had grown up with him almost like a cousin.

The girl was an only child, and she would one day be very rich—but she was neither pretty nor clever—and as they both grew older Cecil ceased to take much interest in her, she was merely in his eyes a well-dressed little nonentity whom his mother was fond of, and it did not occur to him that she had any special preference for himself. A man does not usually fall in love with a girl who is always there, and whom he has called by her Christian name all his life—it is the new and the unknown that attracts his fancy and captures his heart. But in Ida Vincent's eyes Cecil was a divinity. Young women are not slow to guess at things connected with their own future settlement in life, and Miss Vincent divined easily that the

entente cordiale between Cecil's mother and aunt and her own parents did not exist for nothing.

Cecil, moreover, was all that was attractive to the fancy of a girl who, owing to her mother's ill-health and her father's business engagements, went out but very little into the society of young people of her own age. Cecil was the only young man with whom she had ever been much thrown, and he was handsome, clever and successful—his smooth-shaven face with its sensitive features and keen blue eyes seemed to her to be a type of all that was desirable in manhood. She had moulded herself upon his opinions for years, for she had none of her own. She read the books that he recommended, admired the pictures and the music she had heard him say that he liked, and echoed his views upon religion and politics with a parrot-like persistence.

Cecil thought her a silly little thing, for although she was now five-and-twenty, she always seemed to him a child; but Ida Vincent, in ignorance of his opinion of her, continued to worship him.

Poor Ida! She little knew what was in store for her to-day when, timing her visit with a due regard to his probable return from the Temple, she found herself upon the doorstep of Mrs. Roscoe's house at about half-past five o'clock.

She came in smiling and a little shy, for she had grown to be shy with her old playmate latterly, and the butler, who understood the situation perfectly, had not failed to inform her duly that "The ladies were both at home, and also Mr. Cecil."

As she was ushered into the warm and pretty room, with its oriental draperies and its tall palms and its flowers and photographs, with the pleasant firelight flickering brightly upon the pictures and china upon the walls and upon the little tea table in front of the hearth, she saw at once that Cecil's face was full of some new emotion, and that the elder ladies were excited and a little disturbed; and she heard his mother say quickly to her son as she came in:

"We will not say anything about it to Ida, I think, my dear." And then Cecil's brisk voice in reply:

"On the contrary, I am going to tell Ida all about it at once. From my old playfellow, at any rate," and he turned to her with a bright and confident smile, "I feel certain of sympathy and good wishes."

Her small face, that was not at all striking or beautiful, flushed

with pleasure—was it some new Brief that was to make him rich and famous? That was the thought that flashed through her mind. How good of him to turn to her for sympathy!

“Oh Cecil, of course I always sympathize with you, you know,” she said a little breathlessly.

“Then wish me joy and good luck, Ida, for I am engaged to the dearest and best and loveliest girl in all England,” he cried gaily.

If Ida Vincent had had any doubts before concerning her love for Cecil, she had none whatever now.

A pang like a knife-thrust went through her heart, and for a moment or two the room seemed to swing and sway around her.

But she was secretive and reserved by nature, and there was that amount of courage in her that she would have died sooner than have let him guess the truth.

She looked up at him with a sickly smile and held out her hand. The young man was too full of his own new excitements and hopes to notice how wan and grey the insignificant little face had suddenly become. Besides, dear good little Ida—he was fond of her of course, they were such old, old friends; but he never did take any particular notice of her, she did not interest him, and whether she looked ill or well, sad or happy, it was all the same to him, as long as he got exactly what he wanted himself. He wanted sympathy just at this moment, and he was perfectly satisfied when she held out her hand and said to him with apparent cordiality:

“I hope indeed that you may be happy, Cecil.”

CHAPTER V.

THE FORRESTERS OF MARSHLANDS.

FIVE years is an appreciable space of time in the history of a human life. In five years one may have lived through a whole cycle of experiences; change and misfortune have had time to assail us, disease and death to torture and rack our bodies, treachery and cruelty to wring or break our hearts. Yet, sometimes again it happens that a whole five years of our life will slip away as quickly and as uneventfully as though they were as many days, and nothing will intervene in all that time to trouble the dead level of our tranquil existence.

And so it had chanced to be with Nell Forrester in the five years that had elapsed since that first memorable visit to her grandmother's house in Wimpole Street. It all seems very long ago to her now.

Nell Forrester is twenty-one. She is a beautiful young woman, several inches taller than the little girl in brown holland frocks who entered upon her woman's experience of life in so stormy a manner. The once slim slip of a girl of sixteen has developed into a tall and exceedingly graceful woman. Her long hair is now-a-days decorously wound into a thick bronze knot at the back of her head; but although her shining eyes are as bright and lovely as in her childish days, there has stolen over the young face that was once so full of eager animation, an intangible something, which has made it altogether a graver and sadder face than it promised to be when last we saw her.

And yet let it not be supposed that this is altogether Colonel Vane Darley's fault.

Nell had no doubt suffered very much at the time on his account. When the door of her grandmother's dreary little back study had closed upon him, and she realised that he was gone beyond recall—that she herself had sent him away, and that he would never come back to her any more—she had felt at first as if she should die of it. It was only then, when she knew that he had gone irrevocably out of her life, that she began to understand what he had become to her; and the pain that she endured taught her her own capacity both for love and suffering. In one short day the girl learnt all that it often takes years for women to find out.

She went through a bad time. Often and often during those first days, through long hours of miserable and hopeless tears, she was tempted to rescind her decision—to undo the words that had sent him from her—to write to his club, and to ask him to come back to her. Yet she never did so. All that she suffered was never quite enough to overcome the strong instinct of right and of wrong that had given her the courage to send him from her.

And then, as the days went on, and she fought her battle over and over again, each time that she conquered she found that the victory grew easier; and then Time, the healer, came to her help, so that she began, as was natural, to recover. She was young

and she had a brave, strong heart. After awhile the image of Vane Darley became fainter in her memory. She began to forget him. Moreover, first love is not at all the everlasting and unalterable thing that poets and romancers would have us believe it to be. As a matter of fact, its roots are generally much nearer the surface, and it takes far less hold of the heart than do the later affections of our maturer years. A first love is mainly made up of illusions that are more or less unreal, and of the natural desire of youth to love and be loved; often, indeed, it is nothing more than flattered vanity, and that pleasing sense of excitement which hovers around situations that are new and untried.

All these things do not strike very deep into the soul. If they are wrenched out fiercely and suddenly, the wounds will bleed profusely; but they will heal up more quickly and more healthily, and will leave less trace upon the after-life and character than is likely to be produced by a second or even a third blow of the same nature.

Time went on, and she heard nothing at all about Colonel Darley. For a long time she had no idea as to what had become of him. He used in the old days to come down to Marshlands for a Sunday now and again, but it did not surprise her that he never came now. Then one day she heard her father say to her sister Dorothea that he had had a letter from him written from Ceylon. He had gone round the world in his yacht—was going on to Japan and to New Zealand—he did not know how long he would be away. Then for years his name was never mentioned again, and Nell did not know whether he was alive or dead. She was very thankful that this was so, for as she grew older she realized better the deadly peril into which she had well-nigh fallen, and the enormity of the man's sin against her, and her one prayer was that she might never see him again.

But as she began to forget, so also she began to forgive him. For, after all, does not forgetfulness of the offender lie almost always at the bottom of our forgiveness of the offence? It all seemed to her so far away now, so faint in the dim distance of her childish past. All the shock of it, and the rough awakening to the worst side of life was so long ago—sometimes it almost seemed as though it had been nothing but a dream.

Still, with an odd inconsistency of feeling—which only proved her, however, to be a true daughter of Eve—she kept, and still

wore, the trinket that Darley had given her—the diamond-studded bangle with the miniature watch in it—which he had clasped upon her wrist on that happy day when she sat by his side on the deck of the “Water Witch.” It symbolized to her the romance of her life.

And all this time Nell had kept her own counsel, and had told no one about that pitiful little story of her early days. With a reticence rare in one young, she had made no confidences on the subject to any one: not to her father, who was Colonel Darley’s friend, and who would have made excuses for him; not even to her sisters, who would perhaps have sympathized with her in their own way. Nell never spoke of it to any one—she held her tongue, and Colonel Darley’s name never passed her lips.

Her sisters, not unnaturally, had remarked the bracelet upon her arm, but they had taken it for granted that it was their grandmother’s present to her. With all her meanness, Lady Forrester had occasionally, when the fancy took her, bestowed some handsome piece of jewellery upon her nieces. She had a store of valuable trinkets locked up in an iron safe in her bed-room. Sometimes, when she was in an extra good temper, the old lady had been known to unlock the safe and to unearth some of her treasures for their benefit.

Millie declared that she remembered that tiny watch very well—grandmamma used to wear it on her chatelaine—and Dottie observed that the diamonds in which it was set used to be round the enamelled snuff-box in the drawing-room cabinet.

“They are paste of course,” said Dottie authoritatively, “but that doesn’t matter; they look just as well, and it was very good of the old thing to have it all mounted up fresh for you in the newest fashion. You must be in high favour with Granny, Miss Nell.”

Nell listened to these remarks with a heightened colour, but in silence—she neither assented nor disclaimed.

“It is safer to let them think it,” she thought, for she felt that she would half die of shame if she were to confess the truth.

An event had occurred immediately after her return to Marshlands from her grandmother’s house, which went far to render her silence possible and easy. This was the sudden and entirely unexpected death of Mr. Hartwood, the vicar. He was struck down by paralysis on the very day of her return, and never

recovered consciousness again ; and on the seventh day he died. Mrs. Hartwood left the Vicarage almost immediately, and was understood to have gone to live in London.

She had been a governess in a school in former days before her marriage to Mr. Hartwood, and as she was left very badly off, it was believed that she intended to resume her former occupation and to eke out her small means by giving lessons in painting in water colours, for which she was supposed to possess some talent.

At any rate, Marshlands knew her no more, and a new vicar and vicaress reigned in the parish in her place.

This seemed to remove out of Nell's way the one danger that might have threatened the disclosure of her secret.

"She will forget all about it," she thought, with a sense of thankful relief, when she heard that Mrs. Hartwood and all her boxes with her, had actually gone up to town by the afternoon express two days after her husband's funeral.

"I shall probably never see her again ; she will soon forget that unlucky meeting."

But Mrs. Hartwood was a person who never forgot. A scandal was the very breath of her nostrils ; an unkind or slanderous story, cooked and recooked again, a dish of which she never grew weary, and she had the most tenacious memory in the world.

So the five years slipped away one after the other peacefully and uneventfully to the Forresters of Marshlands.

Marshlands, as its name denotes, lies low amongst the water-meadows across which the river Laze winds a slow and sluggish stream. They are fine pastures, those green moist meadows that surround the low rambling old house on every side, and they are let, every inch of them, to the surrounding farmers, whose horses and cattle are dotted about over them in countless numbers all through the long summer months. In the winter time, when the Laze overflows its borders, and when the floods are out all over the flat wide plains, Marshlands is a damp and dreary place ; but when the lush green grass grows thick and sweet, and the big-eyed cows are munching their way across the flower-studded pastures, then the level lands have a certain charm of their own.

The sunsets seem redder and fuller across the sad fen country ; there are fine effects of clouds, storm-tossed and orange-edged, of

skies that are flushed with the crimson gladness of dawn, or pale with the trembling opal hues of the dying day.

Nell loved the scenery of her home ; there was a sense of space and vastness in those broad green flats ; they seemed to carry her thoughts onwards and outwards to the sea—to the edge of the world—to the great and illimitable spaces of Eternity itself.

She was the only one in the tumble-down old house on the Laze to whom such thoughts ever came. Marshlands might be silent and desolate from without, but within it was always full of life and commotion. They were "happy-go-lucky," but they were never sad or dull at Marshlands. What matter if the butcher and the grocer clamoured for their money, or the man for the quarter's rates sat awaiting his dues in the hall, or the banker in Fenchester wrote terrible things concerning Mr. Forrester's overdrawn account? Was there not always somehow a way out of the worst of the difficulties? Mr. Forrester himself took it all very easily and good-temperedly, for there was generally some kind friend whom he could waylay, some little dodge or other by which he could manage to raise a little ready money ; or, when the worst came to the worst, there would be the frantic rush up to London, the visit to Wimpole Street, the heartrending appeal to Lady Forrester, and then invariably the triumphant return home with the much-needed cheque that served to stop the clamorous mouths for a while and stave off the impending catastrophe once more.

And they none of them cared. There were times—very bad times these—when for days together the butcher flatly refused to supply them with joints ; and then Gordon Forrester, like a hunter in a primeval country, shouldered his gun manfully and went out to shoot rabbits, for the consumption of his family and household, across the fields, whose poor rents were his sole source of income.

There was no other game of any sort or kind at Marshlands in these days, and even the rabbits were scarce, for the farmers shot them down too. But he always managed to bring something back, and they were all so jolly and good-tempered over it, the girls declaring they liked rabbits ever so much better than beef and mutton, so that the butcher's vengeance fell flat and harmless. Once indeed, they were reduced to a sparrow pie for dinner, and they enjoyed it amazingly. There were some of the

officers over from Fenchester that day ; no one had ever eaten sparrow pie before ; it was pronounced by one and all to be a dish of the most superlative excellence, and it formed a staple and time-honoured family joke for many a long day afterwards.

When Nell was eighteen, being the only one of them all who had the faintest element of responsibility in her composition, she had made a great and conscientious effort to introduce a little order and economy into the family finances. She took the monetary difficulties bravely in hand, and for a whole six months she grappled with the bills and the debts in a truly energetic and enterprising fashion.

But who but herself wanted order and economy at Marshlands ? They were perfectly happy as they were. Something always turned up to save them from bankruptcy and starvation. What a little goose Nell was, they said, to worry and fret herself over such stupid matters !

So after a time she grew disheartened and gave it up, and let herself go with the easy swimming tide of a patched-up insolvency, which, however long it may endure, is bound sooner or later to end in catastrophe and disaster.

Dorothea Forrester, a tall large-made young woman, of Juno-like proportions, who by some freak of fancy had always gone by the name of Dottie, was by this time twenty-eight, and had unfortunately outgrown her good looks. She had been very handsome at nineteen, but that large-typed beauty seldom lasts, and she had now become somewhat coarse in feature and bulky in figure. Yet Dottie, although perfectly conscious that her charms had waned, was not one whit less good-tempered and cheerful for the distressing fact.

As to Millicent, the second sister, she had never had any pretensions to beauty, but she was a strong, active young woman, a fine horsewoman, and an excellent billiard and tennis player. She affected mannish attire, wore stiff-fronted shirts and stand-up collars and dark cloth skirts. She even cut her hair short like a boy's, smoked cigarettes in public, and a short black pipe in the seclusion of her own bedchamber. Millie was always followed about by a troupe of pet dogs : a collie, a greyhound, a rough terrier and a half-bred Irish setter being her constant companions indoors and out. Her canine family snapped and snarled at one another perpetually, and sometimes engaged each other in san-

guinary battles, and then Millie cracked her dog-whip savagely over their heads, and often got her hands badly bitten in separating the combatants.

Dottie was an inveterate gambler. She was deeply interested in racing matters, and had money on every event in England. Oddly enough, she was extraordinarily successful in these ventures, and many a time the family exchequer had been opportunely replenished by her winnings. As to Gordon Forrester, he was always the same: weak, careless and irresponsible—taking things as they came happily and good-humouredly, and not troubling himself about the future, or ever stopping to reflect that at his death the house, that sheltered him for his lifetime only, would have to go to a distant cousin, and that his daughters must then be turned out of it, penniless and homeless. “Sufficient for the day was the evil thereof,” to careless, graceless Gordon Forrester.

He went on, smiling his way through life, borrowing money which he knew he could never pay back; staving off his creditors by little doled-out sops to stop their mouths, and believing himself all the time to be an unlucky and ill-used man, with all the world in a conspiracy against him, to get money out of him when he had not got any to give them.

“Those beggarly tradesmen!” he would say with virtuous indignation, “they ought to be ashamed of annoying a gentleman as they annoy me. They are much better off than I am. Just look at that fellow Joines! Did you see his wife in church last Sunday with a new sealskin jacket on, and an ostrich feather in her bonnet? and I know for a fact that he bought a new mare last week that cost him seventy-five guineas! and that fellow has the face to come badgering me for a miserable twenty pounds or so, for his beastly beef and mutton that was all eaten up a year ago! These people have no conscience at all—absolutely none! It’s the Radical spirit, that is abroad in the country just now, that is the ruin of the lower orders. They are a rascally set, sir, one and all of them!”

And so he went on, year after year, borrowing money, running up debts all round, and paying no one unless literally forced to do so, as he had always done ever since he had lived in Fenshire.

And perhaps considering all these things together: the father who had so little sense of honesty, the old story of the mother

who had thrown so foul a stain of shame upon those she had deserted and betrayed, the daughters who gambled and smoked and flirted—for their flirtations with a long succession of sub-alterns of many regiments from the Fenchester barracks were assuredly not the least amongst the crimes laid to their charge—perhaps it was not on the whole very wonderful that Gordon Forrester and his daughters were in bad odour amongst the highly humdrum and respectable county families of Fenshire, and that Marshlands and its inmates were either avoided as much as possible, or else actually tabooed altogether by the best of them.

“They are a bad lot,” the squires and squiresses would say to one another, with ominous shakings of the head; “how could we allow our nice well-behaved girls to associate with those Forresters? It is much better to keep clear of the whole family altogether.”

CHAPTER VI.

NELL'S NEW LOVER.

AND now all at once there came about a great and wonderful thing, that shook the whole family down to its very foundations.

Nell Forrester became engaged to be married! No event of such magnitude had as yet occurred in the family annals—nothing that they any of them remembered had ever happened so astonishing and so momentous.

There arose about her a perfect storm of excitement, a chorus of congratulations, a veritable tumult of joy and thanksgiving—it seemed as though the whole family was going out of its senses with delight.

Nell herself was the most unmoved of them all. It had all taken place so quickly, with such a bewildering suddenness, that she had hardly realized or understood what was coming to pass until she found herself engaged. Even now she could hardly understand it.

It seemed only yesterday that they had all three gone over to the ball at Fenchester, which their friends and allies, the officers of the 110th, were giving in return for the many civilities shown to them in the neighbourhood. It was only the third ball which Nell had ever been to. She had worn a white muslin dress that

had once been Millie's; it was not particularly fresh, or new-fashioned, and she was very conscious of its shortcomings.

The room had been very crowded. It was a marvel to Nell that anybody should have singled out her own insignificant self amongst all the crush of smartly-dressed women who were present, and it had been a little surprise to her when their friend Mr. Drake, of the 110th—"Ducky," as he was always called—brought up a tall smooth-shaven young man with serious eyes and introduced him to her with the words:

"Here is my friend, Mr. Cecil Roscoe, who has been moving heaven and earth for an hour to get introduced to you, Miss Nell. Now please give him a dance, and then I shall be left in peace."

"It is quite true," said Mr. Roscoe, with a little laugh, when he was left standing by Nell's side. "I've been pestering everybody I knew in the room to get an introduction to you."

"To me?" repeated Nell in surprise.

"Yes; but, oddly enough, I couldn't find anybody who knew you. At last I ran Drake to earth, coming out of the supper-room with his partner on his arm. I wasn't going to lose sight of him, so I dogged his footsteps, like the villain of a transpontine melodrama, till I caught him free at last, and then we couldn't find you. I have been hunting for you all over the room."

Nell did not say much, but she wondered why he had taken such pains to know her. She was not in the least vain—very beautiful women seldom are—besides which she was painfully conscious of the shabbiness of her toilette. That old-fashioned muslin frock, indeed, had weighed considerably upon her mind. Surely in all that brilliantly-dressed crowd there must be many girls whom this London man might have found more worth his while to dance with than herself. But he danced with her many times after that, and he danced with no one else.

That was the beginning of it. Then her father, to whom Mr. Drake had also introduced him, invited him to Marshlands to lunch on the following Sunday.

He came with sundry others over from Fenchester. They were a large party at lunch, and there was much noisy laughter and many jokes of a somewhat foolish nature. Mr. Roscoe sat next to her. Nell did not talk loud and scream with laughter as her sisters did, neither did she smoke cigarettes with her coffee,

or call the young men present by their nicknames. All these things offended Cecil's taste abominably, as also did the badly-ordered and badly-cooked lunch—the wine that was execrable, the general scramble for food, everybody jumping up and helping themselves indiscriminately from the table or sideboard in a casual fashion. Then there were the dogs, who prowled round the room, begging unreprievedly for scraps and bones, which they retired to devour beneath the visitors' feet. Cecil Roscoe, who was fastidious to a fault, and who had always been accustomed to everything of the best, to daintily-cooked dishes and a well-appointed table, and to noiseless servants who waited like clock-work, was not at all favourably impressed by all that went on around him during this noisy and disorderly lunch. Yet for all that, his strong attraction to Nell remained unabated. She seemed to him to be so unlike all the rest, so superior to all her surroundings; she was like a flower, he thought, set in a garden of weeds.

Towards the end of that terrible meal there arose all at once a wild commotion. The collie and the Irish setter, having come to a disagreement over a cutlet bone, had flown with deafening howls and yells at each other's throats.

In a moment everybody sprang to their feet, the battle was raging underneath the table, Millie flung herself headlong under the tablecloth, with an adventurous subaltern after her, in order to drag out the delinquents. Frantic cries arose on every side:

"Catch hold of his tail, Poppet."

"It's all Snap's fault—hold down his head, Ducky."

"Fetch the dog-whip, Dottie; it's hanging up in the hall, or here, give us the hearth brush, quick!"

"Laddie has got him by the leg. Let go, Laddie, let go! Mind your hand, Poppet. Give it him hard!"

Then followed thumps and shouts, interspersed with further howls and barks from the angry combatants, who lay locked together in a struggling mass on the carpet.

Cecil Roscoe threw a helpless glance at Nell, he looked so utterly wretched that she laughed—dog fights were nothing at all new to her; they were constantly taking place between Millie's pets.

"Isn't it a hullabaloo!" she said to him aside. "Millie will have the dogs in the room, and she always makes this commotion

over it when they fight ; but they never really hurt each other. Snap is a cur at heart, and Laddie has no teeth to speak of. But you must be quite deafened, Mr. Roscoe, by all this noise. If you have done lunch, shall we go out ?”

He assented eagerly, and they slipped out of the room together. The last Cecil saw of the battle was Millie hanging on to the collie's tail, whilst the young gentleman whom she addressed as “Poppet” tugged violently at the appendage of the Irish terrier. Dottie, meanwhile, stood over them, slashing away savagely with the dog-whip, assisted by the devoted Ducky, who was flourishing the hearth broom ; and Gordon Forrester, laughing heartily at the whole scene, was standing looking on with his back to the fireplace. As a further detail, it may be mentioned that the tablecloth had been half dragged off the table in the struggle, and some of the crockery and spoons and forks lay on the floor.

After this veritable pandemonium, how delightful it was to get into the silence and peace outside, with the fresh air of the garden on his brow and with Nell by his side ! It was a lovely afternoon in the last week of September, balmy and sunny as June itself. The dahlias and chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies stood up in long gay rows along the garden borders, and there was a dash of yellow and orange in the sweeping boughs of the lime trees that bordered the path.

“I do wish,” said Nell, turning to him with a little effort at apology, “that Millie would shut up the dogs at meal times, and that Dottie would not make quite so much noise. They are such dear good girls, my sisters, but I am afraid you must think us a very rowdy lot, Mr. Roscoe.”

He turned upon her with a look of mingled tenderness and admiration.

“But you,” he said, and there was a sort of suppressed break in his voice, “*you* are different.”

He was not in the least like Vane Darley—in fact, no two people on earth could be more widely dissimilar—yet at that moment Cecil Roscoe reminded her of him.

The look in his eyes as he spoke those few words was a look that she had seen before, on the deck of the “Water Witch,” when Vane Darley had told her that he loved her. She had not known what it meant then, but she knew now.

Her heart began to beat a little with unwonted excitement.

"You won't care to come again to such a rackety household, I am afraid, Mr. Roscoe," she continued, with a slight laugh, in order to cover her confusion.

"On the contrary, I was just going to ask you if I might come again next Sunday—not to lunch, but afterwards? I could walk over from Fenchester. There is—a man there—at the Cavalry Barracks—I don't think you know him," he went on vaguely and altogether mendaciously; "he has asked me to stay with him next Sunday, and if I do, may I come over to Marshlands?"

He did come down to Fenchester again—whether to stay with his friend at the Cavalry Depôt or at the George Hotel in the High Street was not clearly apparent. But, anyhow, he turned up at Marshlands in time to go out for a walk by Nell's side, with the remainder of the family, subalterns, dogs and all, far ahead of them. And the third Sunday he came again, this time uninvited and unexpected.

It was after this third visit that Miss Forrester said to her father confidentially :

"Look here, Gordie"—the elder girls were in the habit of calling their father by his Christian name—"I am not very sharp about these things, but it strikes me that Mr. Cecil Roscoe is after Nell."

"You don't say so, Dottie? God bless my soul, what makes you think it?"

"Haven't you noticed that he has come here three Sundays running, you dear old stupid?"

"But, Dottie, my love, that is nothing wonderful. These young fellows—Drake and Popham, and a host of them—they are always here, it seems to me—a dozen times in the week, as well as on Sundays."

"Ah, but this is quite different. Mr. Roscoe comes down all the way from London, and when he is here he speaks to nobody else but Nell. He sits by her, he walks by her, and he looks at her as if he could eat her. And I am quite certain he means business, Gordie. You see he is not our sort at all—not in the least like Ducky and Poppet and all the others—and he doesn't care for me or Millie at all, I think, only for Nell. I expect the rest of us are too go-ahead for him—these barristers are always

horribly prim and prudish, not a bit like the soldier boys—but then, when they do sit down tight and square and look at a girl as this chap looks at Nell, I expect then there is no nonsense about it. This Mr. Roscoe means to marry Nell, if I'm not mistaken."

"My dear Dottie, you astonish me!"

"Well, it is rather astonishing, isn't it, for nobody ever wanted to marry Millie or me, which is a pity, as we are all so poor. I suppose no one ever fancied us in the light of wives, although we are all very well to laugh and lark with. However, it's past praying for now with Millie and me—we've outstayed our market—but Nell might just as well marry if she gets a chance."

"Certainly, certainly. Dear me, little Nell! I never thought about such a thing! It would be a good thing for her to have a husband and a home of her own—I could go up and stay with her—and perhaps," his thoughts running on riotously ahead, "I daresay, if he's a good sort of chap, he might let me have a little ready. I am sure he wouldn't mind helping an aged father-in-law to silence that impudent fellow, Thompson, who has sent in his miserable bill again, for the third time, this morning."

"We mustn't count our chickens before they are hatched, Gordie," counselled Dottie prudently. "The first thing to do is to secure him."

"Ah, yes, certainly, my love; but what can we do?"

"Well, I think you might write and invite him down to stay here from Saturday to Monday next. I know the name of his club; just drop him a line there and ask him—I feel sure it would bring matters to a head if he stopped in the house."

"But, my dear Dottie, wouldn't he find it very uncomfortable, and very dull too? You see, I haven't got any shooting now, unless it's rabbits and sparrows. We have got nothing to offer Mr. Roscoe."

"We have got Nell," said Dottie with a laugh; and the invitation was sent.

As a matter of course, it was accepted, and Cecil Forrester arrived at Marshlands on the Saturday morning in time for lunch, at which meal, out of consideration for the impending event—which by this time was well in the atmosphere of the house—there were neither dogs nor subalterns in the room.

That same afternoon he spoke to her, when, by some fortuitous

and not altogether accidental combination of family arrangements, he found himself left alone in the library with her.

She was hardly surprised, for she had known, even better than Dottie did, that he was in love with her, and that it must come to this ; but she had not expected him to say anything so soon, and the suddenness of it alarmed and disquieted her.

She begged him to give her a little time, a few hours even, to reflect and to think it over, and he told her at once that he would not ask for an answer until the following evening.

She went upstairs to her own room and flung herself dejectedly into an arm-chair, and she thought about Vane Darley !

Not that she regretted him, or wished him back in the least, but only that she remembered so well exactly how all that he had said had affected her.

How different it was to this——! There had been a quick response within her own heart then, to those other long-ago words of love! A breath of Eden in the air, a touch of that *feu sacré*, without which the draught of love is but a flat and tasteless thing. Why could she not feel all this now ?

Vane Darley was, no doubt, an unprincipled blackguard, who had meant nothing right or honest towards her, and Cecil Roscoe was a good and honourable man—a lover who loved her sincerely, who was ready and eager to make her his wife in the sight of God and man, and who would certainly be the best and truest of husbands.

Yet Vane Darley had touched an answering chord within her, whilst Cecil Roscoe left her cold and unresponsive !

The door opened softly and Dottie, with her hat on, came quickly in.

“ Well ? ” she said breathlessly, brimming over with excitement and curiosity, “ Well ? have you got any news for us, Nell ? Has he spoken ? Is it all right ? Millie is talking to him downstairs—one of us had to stop with him—but she won’t dare to question him, and we are dying to know, Nell. Has he spoken yet ? ”

“ If you mean has Mr. Roscoe asked me to marry him, ” answered Nelly dully, “ yes, he has, but—— ”

Dottie was down on her knees beside her in an instant, hugging and kissing her frantically.

“ Oh, dear little Nell, how delightful ! Oh, I am so glad ! A thousand million congratulations to you, darling Nell. ”

“Oh! but, Dottie, I haven't made up my mind at all; I don't know; I am to think it over; I am not at all sure that I like him well enough to marry him.”

“Oh, Nell! don't be such a little fool! You must like him enough! Why, you might never get another chance! Don't, for heaven's sake, throw it away. Just look at Millie and me; growing old and losing our looks, and never a ghost of a husband for either of us! And if you marry Mr. Roscoe, you will live in London, and we could come and stay with you, and perhaps in London we might meet somebody, for we shall never get a husband down here, you know, any one of us. We know nobody but the soldier boys, and they are all as poor as rats, bless 'em; but in London we might get a few chances, and then, Nell, do think what a relief it would be to poor papa to get even one of us off his hands; we should all be able to manage so much better with one less to be clothed and fed.”

And it was by these and other arguments of a like nature that they had talked her over.

All that Dottie said was perfectly true and perfectly sensible, and her father and Millie, who each subsequently had long private talks with her as well, only said much the same thing in other language. Millie dwelt much on Mr. Roscoe's personal qualifications; he was young, he was nice-looking, “Ducky” had told her that he was very clever, and would be sure to get on in his profession and make his way in the world, and was it not patent to the meanest capacity that he was desperately in love with her?

What more could Nell possibly want?

Nell did not know what she wanted. And yet she did know quite well, in spite of all these unanswerable arguments, that she did *not* want Cecil Roscoe.

“It isn't, you know, as if he were old, or ugly, or disagreeable,” urged Millie; “nobody could say that you married him for money or any low reason of that kind, and he is very nice, I am sure.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“Of course he wouldn't suit me,” she went on frankly, “and I don't suppose I should suit him; I like men to be horsey and doggy, and to have a little ‘go’ about them. Mr. Roscoe is very quiet, certainly; but then that just suits you, Nell, for you are as quiet as a mouse. You and he would hit it off capitally.”

“Very likely,” assented Nell once more.

"You cannot possibly say that you dislike him, Nell."

"Oh no, I like him very much indeed!" she admitted heartily.

"Then do for goodness sake marry him, and bring a little luck to us all; for the sake of the rest of us at least. You ought to see that a respectable marriage is your duty."

Nell came to the conclusion that it was her duty, and not altogether a disagreeable duty either. It was pleasant to be loved and made much of, to be treated like a queen, and told that she was perfect and lovely. Oh yes, she liked him well enough, certainly. It was perhaps not love, for Nell knew what love was, but possibly love might never come her way again. That one brush of the angel's wing, long, long ago, might be all that was ever to be vouchsafed to her of that dazzling vision. She did not love Cecil Roscoe, but she came to the conclusion that she might be a very happy woman as his wife.

"I am afraid I am not good enough for you," she said a little brokenly to him, when on the Sunday evening he had claimed his answer, and she had laid her hands mutely in his.

"My darling, you are worlds and worlds too good for me!" he answered rapturously, taking her in his arms and holding her to his heart. "When I think that I have won your love——!"

"Oh, Cecil! I wish I could love you better, more as you deserve to be loved," she faltered, striving a little to tell him the truth.

"Dearest, love grows apace; I am not afraid," answered her lover—but Nell felt doubtful.

(To be continued.)

In the Harz Mountains.

THE HARZ MOUNTAINS, though often described by German travellers and sung by German poets, are not much known to English tourists, and yet it would be hard to find a district more suitable for health and recreation.

The air is pure and bracing and the scenery, though not grand, possesses a peculiar charm, the undulating expanse of hill and valley, nearly all covered with wood, presenting a delightful and varying panorama.

The range extends about 70 miles on the borders of Brunswick, Anhalt and Prussia, taking in a part of each, and may be approached from Göttingen or Brunswick.

We chose the latter, and were well pleased with our choice, as the town having so far been spared by the modern restorer, contains many streets of quaint mediæval houses and some buildings of great antiquity, many of which are built with over-hanging upper stories adorned with elaborate carvings.

As, however, our object is to describe the Harz Mountains we need not linger over these details but proceed to Harzburg, distant about 1½ hours by train. It is more of a village than a town and has not yet reached the dignity of a "Stadt," but the situation is good, as it stands high on the spurs of the mountains, at the entrance of a broad valley which runs up between well-wooded heights.

Few of the houses join, most of them stand separate on each side of the two broad roads which, divided by a small stream, form the principal streets and which rise steadily in the direction of the mountains. Trees abound, both along the sides of the roads and in the gardens which surround many of the houses. In the grounds of the Lindenhof Hotel stands a huge lime tree, from which the house is named and which is said to be 300 years old. Chairs and tables are placed under its spreading branches, and thus an *al fresco* restaurant is extemporized, combining ample

shade with abundance of the delightful mountain air, where, it is needless to add, vast quantities of beer are consumed during the summer. The principal visitors to the Harz are Germans and Dutch, two nations long and favourably known for their skill in potting, both mighty wielders of the tankard. The latter are probably much attracted by the fact of the Harz being their nearest mountain range, for a short and easy journey brings visitors from the plains of Holland. English people do not seem to find their way frequently to these secluded villages, and, as a natural consequence, one notices that prices are moderate and little but German is spoken; as the accomplished waiters, who by living in London and Paris have acquired foreign tongues, find here no scope to exercise their talents and go elsewhere, leaving this district to their untravelled brethren. There are, however, several hotels in Harzburg and a good band, which plays twice a day in an open space called "Unter den Eichen," from the number of oaks by which it is shaded.

The usual accompaniment of chairs and tables and a "Restoration," at which various refreshments can be obtained, is not wanting, and every one who listens to the music is expected to order something "for the good of the house."

As the railway ends at Harzburg, excursions to the many places of interest in the neighbourhood must be made by carriage or on foot, though ponies are obtainable by those who prefer the saddle, and of late years the new and fashionable mode of locomotion by bicycle has been largely introduced.

Following the road from the Eichen as it ascends the hillside, you pass great quarries where numbers of men are employed getting out stone for building and road making, and you arrive at a waterfall, which is considered such a wonder that omnibuses are run specially to take visitors to see it. As, however, it consists merely of a very small stream falling gently over a rock of moderate height, we were much disappointed and wondered at its great reputation.

The explanation probably is that waterfalls being scarce in this picturesque country they must make the most of such as they can produce, so they sound the trumpet loudly over every pretty cascade.

Close to Harzburg stands the Burgberg, a conical hill covered with trees with a winding path leading by easy ascent to the top

where stands an obelisk in honour of Bismarck, bearing a medallion portrait of him with the inscription, "Nach Canossa gehen wir nicht," the words spoken by him on a celebrated occasion in the Reichstag. There are charming views from the top and from various points on the way up, over the adjacent valley and the tree-clad hilltops beyond, which form an undulating expanse of wood as far as the eye can reach.

Towering above all rises the Brocken, the most conspicuous object in the landscape, not only because of its height, but because it is a bare rocky point entirely denuded of trees.

If, when ascending the Burgberg, you turn off to the right through the forest, a little below the summit, and follow a road along the top of the ridge, you come, after two miles walking, to the Rabensclippe, a high granite cliff, well known for the extensive view it affords over the mountain range. This great mass of granite, standing boldly up on the hillside and in the midst of the forest, forms a very striking object. The principal plateau is utilized as a "Restauration," a wooden cottage with out-houses having been built there, and the space in front of the buildings being supplied with chairs and tables.

At one corner of the plateau a huge crag juts forth, and a flight of steps has been hewn out on one side, so that one can easily climb to the top, where a wide space has been railed in, and whence one looks over the tree tops on the slope to the rising ground on the opposite side of the valley.

It would be hard to imagine more delightful walks and drives than those afforded by the roads leading in all directions through this picturesque region. Shady and pleasant, with the pure mountain air laden with the scent of pines, the innumerable breaks in the forest commanding the most charming sylvan vistas, they form an unsurpassed recreation ground for the holiday maker.

The scarcity of birds will, however, strike those who are used to English woods, with their abundance of feathered inhabitants; and this is undoubtedly a drawback to the traveller's enjoyment, as even late in the season, when most birds have ceased singing, their presence in any considerable numbers adds such a singular charm to the woodland.

But in the Harz one must be prepared, in a great measure, for

solitude, and must endeavour to enjoy the beauty of the forest unadorned with bird-life.

About three miles from Harzburg lies the little town of Oker, with numerous melting works, the smoke from which contributes largely to spoil the adjacent landscape, but one soon gets away from it, and following the little river up its course, one enters a narrow rocky glen, called the Okerthal. For several miles the road follows this defile with a rocky wall on each side, sometimes forming huge cliffs and fantastic slopes of stone, while trees grow in every available spot.

At the point where the Okerthal divides into two valleys is a halting place, known as Ruhmkerhalle, where stands a small inn which is the centre for excursions in the neighbourhood. Opposite the house an attempt has been made to form a waterfall by bringing a very small stream to the top of the cliff, down which it pours gracefully but somewhat feebly.

The top of the cliff can easily be reached by a path through the wood, and affords a view over the two valleys, as well as the country around, which amply makes up for the shortcomings of the cascade. From the abundance of trees it is only natural to expect numbers of saw mills built at different points on the river where the water-power may be best utilized.

These are principally employed cutting up timber, but also in making wood paper, a strange-looking substance something like pasteboard, only softer and of the colour of deal, which is used for packing goods.

About four miles west of Oker lies the ancient town of Goslar, picturesquely situated at the head of a wide valley, and remarkable for its very antique appearance, the entrance from the east being through an archway, at the side of which stands an ancient circular tower with a conical slated roof, like the turrets of a French *château*. There are few modern houses to be seen in the town, most being mediæval in style, with gabled roofs and decorated fronts. In the market place, or square, stands the principal hotel, called Kaiserwerth, and built in 1494, with a high pitched roof surmounted by a tower. A row of life-size figures, carved in wood and representing eight German emperors, stand in niches between the windows of the second floor, and the whole front is highly imposing. Close to the Kaiserwerth, also in the square, stands the Rathhaus, or Hotel de Ville, began in

1136 by Lothair, and finished in 1184 by Barbarossa. On going up a flight of outside steps you enter a large rather low hall, or ante-room, with quaint old brass candelabras. From it a narrow passage leads to the presence chamber, where the emperors used to receive oaths of allegiance seated on a chair, which still remains and which bears a portrait of Francis I. on the back. The walls are adorned with pictures of certain emperors and of mythical persons, the ceiling with scriptural subjects; all being the work of a fifteenth century painter, Michael Wohlgemüth. Amongst the curiosities shown here are some MSS. of great antiquity, a charter of Henry IV. dated 1063; an autograph letter of Luther, of 1529; and a beautifully illuminated copy of the Gospels, the colours of which are as bright as when first laid on. On the outskirts of the town, overlooking it, stands the Kaiserhaus, built in the eleventh century by Henry III. and long the residence of the German emperors. It was restored a few years ago, so thoroughly that very little of its ancient character remains, except in the little chapel, modelled after the Aachen minster, and containing a monument of Henry III., a recumbent stone figure on the top of a sarcophagus.

On the first floor there is a handsome hall of large dimensions, in the centre of which stands the ancient imperial throne on a raised platform.

One side of the hall is occupied by windows, the other by modern frescoes representing scenes in German history, the centre picture containing a group of the men who restored the German empire in 1870, of whom the late Emperor William is the most prominent figure. Very little, however, can be said of these paintings as works of art, though the scenes they represent are in harmony with the character of the place.

One can spend a week pleasantly at Harzburg, and then, taking the train *via* Halberstadt, by a circuitous route through the plain, go to Blankenburg, another little town prettily situated at the foot of the hills, and dominated by a huge Schloss, or palace, which stands on a height outside. A remarkable sandstone ridge, about 400 feet high, called the Teufelsmauer, runs from the outskirts of the town about two miles in a south-easterly direction. It is covered with trees, except the crest, which is composed of bare rock broken into craggy points. One of these stands up 50 or 60 feet, and is ascended by steps cut in the stone,

while at the top is a railed-in platform commanding a fine view. A rough path has been made on the top of the ridge with steps cut in the rock, where necessary, so that one can walk the whole length and overlook a wide expanse of country each side, with wooded hills and cultivated plains.

Blankenburg, like Goslar, contains some quaint old houses with gabled roofs and carved fronts, one of which bore the date 1688, but the appearance of the town altogether is more modern. Most of the streets are narrow, and some have steps, especially those leading up the hill to the castle, where visitors are admitted on payment of 6d. each. You enter by an archway leading into a central courtyard, and, in order to preserve the carpets and parquets from injury, each visitor is provided with a pair of list slippers to wear over his boots, which makes walking rather irksome. There are about 200 rooms in the castle, most of them small and many badly lighted, particularly in the older part of the building, which dates from the twelfth century, and in which the ceilings are vaulted, some of them being handsomely decorated. The walls are adorned with a great many fine suits of armour, together with matchlocks, arquebuses, swords and other weapons, very well kept and tastefully arranged. Some handsome marqueterie furniture is to be seen, and a few good pictures by Dürer, Cranach, Teniers and several unknown artists, but most are of an inferior description.

In one of the rooms there is a collection of landscapes, figures, &c., copied in needlework by the court ladies of former times, and framed so as to look like engravings.

Scattered through the building are numerous stuffed birds and beasts, with the heads of stags and boars, as is to be expected in a sporting country which is regularly visited by the Emperor in the shooting season. A theatre is situated on the second story, and, just in front of the stage, a portion of the rock on which the castle is built has been allowed to project through the floor, the principal building being placed terrace-wise on its slope, so that the upper rooms rest on the same solid foundation as the tower. Externally the castle has no beauty, as it is simply a large square plastered building without any architectural merit, but its great size and commanding position give it a kind of dignity.

About a mile and a half north of the town stand the ruins of another castle, known as the Regenstein, and formerly inhabited

by a race of robber knights, a branch of the house of Blankenburg. It is built on the summit of a sandstone ridge similar to the Teufelsmauer, and parallel to it, but not so high, though in places more precipitous. Nothing but ruins now remain, though the place was evidently very extensive and strongly fortified. The north side, being built on the edge of a high cliff, must have been impregnable, some of the casemates having been hollowed out of the solid rock, in which also dungeons have been constructed.

There is a very fine view from the highest point over the deep valley below and the fine wood beyond, as well as over the great range of the Harz southwards. Altogether Regensburg well repays a visit, as it contains much that interests both the antiquarian and the artist. A drive of about eight miles takes one from Blankenburg to Treseburg, a charmingly-situated little village in the Bode valley. Most of the way lies through a large wood, the road rising gradually until the top of the range is reached, when it descends more rapidly to the village. Near the foot of the hill we stopped under a high rock on the roadside, through which a small tunnel has been pierced, and traversing it found ourselves on a terrace called *Wilhelmsblick*, overlooking a deep glen shaped like an amphitheatre. The little river Bode enters the glen on the south side, and flows along it towards the *Wilhelmsblick* rock, when it curves sharply to the east, and, bending backwards, runs in the reverse direction till it passes out of the valley through a chasm in the cliff, describing an almost complete circle. In the centre of the valley is a fir wood standing on high ground, and the river flows round it, the dark green of the trees contrasting picturesquely with the sparkling stream. The entire scene, as viewed from *Wilhelmsblick*, is one of great and peculiar beauty, which on a bright summer's day becomes quite fascinating. A road runs from Treseburg up the Bode valley at a little height above the stream, and, for most of the way, through a wood which rises abruptly from the valley.

Some little way from the village you come to the circular glen in which the river makes such a remarkable curve, and see it from the opposite point to that of *Wilhelmsblick*.

Walking through the central wood, round which the river runs, you reach the point immediately below the tunnel, and look up the high cliff which forms that part of the valley. It is

very precipitous in places, but a number of trees and shrubs manage to cling to the sides, and add much to the beauty of the scene. Half-an-hour's walk up the hill on the opposite side of the village takes you to a small plateau called the Weisser Hirsch, from which you look down on the little collection of houses. From it a vast extent of hill and valley is to be seen, the Brocken in the distance, the only treeless mountain within view, a great undulating expanse of woodland lying below it. About a mile beyond the Weisser Hirsch, following the forest path at the top of the ridge, you come to a monument erected to the memory of a German poet named Pfeil, who having been a great sportsman and very fond of the woods, this solitary spot was thought the most appropriate for his memorial. It consists of a high pedestal of polished granite, on the top of which stands a well-modelled bronze stag, life-size, while a medallion portrait of the poet is placed halfway up on the side of the pedestal. The general effect is that of a monument to the memory of a stag with a portrait of Pfeil as an accessory. Continuing the route through the wood for about two miles you find yourself at the Hexen Tanz Platz, a broad, rocky plateau at the top of a high cliff overlooking the Bode Valley. This, according to ancient tradition, was the place at which the witches who were supposed to frequent the Brocken held their saturnalia; and their arrival, mounted on broomsticks and winged monsters, has been depicted by various artists. In these prosaic days, however, when public interest in the doings of witches has ceased, their trysting-place is occupied by an inn, with the usual accompaniment of an *al fresco* restaurant, chairs and tables being placed in the open. Deep down, immediately below the Tanz Platz, lies the Bode Valley, with high walls of rock on each side, running down to Thale on the right and up to Treseburg on the left. On the opposite side is a similar plateau, known as the Ross Trappe, where a marsh is seen with a fanciful resemblance to a horse's footprint, on which is founded a legend of a princess, in her endeavours to escape the pursuit of a giant, having leaped her horse across the valley. The experienced traveller will, however, have no difficulty in recalling many similar legends in other mountainous districts, invented to account for any freak of nature which strikes the popular fancy. The practice here is to fire successive pistol shots in order that the visitors may hear the echo

rolling along the valley, the effect of which is certainly fine, and it is quite possible, without waiting for an enchanted steed, to cross the valley by means of a steep path running down one side and up the other. Admirable views, however, can be obtained from either height without undergoing this toil. Considering the charming situation of Treseburg and the singular beauty of the surrounding country, one can hardly fancy any one being disappointed with a visit there, and indeed many people make it their headquarters for a summer holiday. Combining the attractions of mountain, wood and river, it fully justifies the German epithet of "idyllic," at least in the sunny days of summer, when the artist will easily find many a tempting spot for sketching. Nor will the scientific inquirer lack employment, as the caves in the Bode Thal contain the bones of extinct animals, and the contorted strata of the great rock masses afford subjects of high interest to the geologist. Good roads connect the village with the neighbouring towns, and an hour's drive takes you to the railway at Thale, so that Treseburg, though primitive, cannot be called inaccessible. The romantic will, perhaps, hear with indifference that the hotels are clean and well managed, but to the ordinary mortal this information will not come amiss, and the large class to whom life is chiefly made up of "bad times" will hear with satisfaction that the prices are moderate. Here, as at other places in the Harz, boarding terms or "pension" can be obtained at the hotels for six marks a day for a stay of not less than a week, and this includes board, lodging and attendance. Game abounds in the woods, and one sometimes catches sight of a stag in the thicket, when passing along the highway; but beyond this modest indulgence the traveller can hardly hope to go, as the shootings are most strictly preserved. This country, therefore, cannot be called the paradise of sportsmen, but its many other attractions will in a measure make up for its failure to supply the excitement of the chase. Those who, after a stay at Treseburg, are anxious to ascend the Brocken, might drive to Blankenburg, where they will find a toothed mountain railway, something like that on the Rigi, running up the hill to Elbingerode, and affording fine views during the ascent. At Elbingerode carriages may be hired to go up the mountain, at the top of which is an inn called the Brockenhaus, sufficiently conspicuous all over the

neighbouring country to serve as its own advertiser. The ascent of the Brocken, having been immortalized by Heine, requires no description here, and, if undertaken in fine weather, will amply repay the tourist. In order to vary the route, it would be well to descend by Samson's Mine to Andreasburg, thence by train to Herzberg, where we take leave of the hill country.

AUGUSTUS HILL.

Fascinating Mrs. Vereker.

CHAPTER I.

GASCOYNE of Dewylands at Oxbridge was more like a shy girl than a young Briton, with a big fortune awaiting him when he came of age.

He had a mother, a very energetic woman, who managed everything for him. She had even taken a house in the neighbourhood of Oxbridge in order to superintend his University career.

Gascoyne was artistic, he was musical, went in for "cul'cha," and although we thought him an ass, and called him Anna Maria (his Christian name being Adrian), we liked and respected him, knowing him to be "every inch" a gentleman.

I came in luck's way, got a good appointment in a distant colony, and bade farewell to Oxbridge.

I was some years abroad, returning an independent man, out of touch with the world of London, and just a bit liverish. Gascoyne was the first old acquaintance I encountered. The slim lad had developed into a handsome man, with a thin close-shaven face of almost feminine beauty, but under its mildness there was promise of more strength than I had expected.

"Come to my place for a day or two," he said hospitably. "You were always a favourite of mother's, and I want you to meet——"

He paused, blushing like a girl.

"Engaged, I suppose?" I said. "Wish you joy, dear boy. She's a very fortunate girl, whoever she is."

"Thank you, Parr," he replied, blushing still more deeply. "But she isn't a girl, you know, only a widow."

"A widow?" I echoed, wondering if the lad had fallen into the clutches of some adventuress. "There are very fascinating widows in the world."

"She's quite young, less than you'd expect, and her husband

led her a sad life of it," Gascoyne went on, his bashfulness slipping from him as he spoke of his *fiancée*. "He was an army man, major in a crack regiment, but a perfect brute. She's well off though, and his old mother looks after her. She's staying down at our place from Saturday to Monday, and I want you to meet her. Won't you come, old chap?"

Having nothing of any sort either better or worse on hands, I promised gladly. I had never been at Dewylands—the house was shut up while Gascoyne and his mother resided at Oxbridge—but I knew from the lie of the country that it stood somewhere amongst the Surrey hills, and that it was a lovely old place, worth seeing under any circumstances.

So fixing the next Saturday for my visit, I bade my kindly friend good-bye.

Dewylands even exceeded my expectations. A dear old Queen Anne house, genuine article, delightfully unspoilt by renovation, and buried in green trees. Yes, a prize amongst houses. Lucky woman, lucky widow, I thought, as the fine old lady, advanced in years, but attractive and queenly still, met and welcomed me.

She was eager to tell me of her son's happiness. "Vere is a most charming girl," she said in her enthusiastic way; "brimming with cleverness, affectionate, devoted to my boy. Oh, Mr. Parr, I am overjoyed at the engagement."

I ventured to inquire where Adrian had met this piece of perfection.

"It was my doing," Mrs. Gascoyne said proudly. "I introduced him to her. I was simply captivated by her, and knew Adrian would follow my example. I was not astray in my calculations."

"Always under his mother's thumb," I thought. "Poor lad."

"It was at Ostend," Mrs. Gascoyne went on, nodding her handsome head. "She was at the same hotel, sat next me at table. I was quite enchanted with her, as every one is who meets her. I am quite sure you will be fascinated by her also; but you mustn't try to cut my boy out, you know."

I laughed.

"My dear madam," I said, "I don't think a dried-up old chip of humanity, with nothing but a trifling pension, could dare enter the lists with a noble young fellow like your son."

I did not add, "and his twelve thousand a year," but I thought it.

However, I had not much chance of making up to the widow that day, because she did not appear. Late in the evening a telegram informed our hostess that Mrs. Vereker was unavoidably detained in town, but that she would arrive at Dewylands by the first train in the morning.

"Now, how strange it is that she invariably does that," said Mrs. Gascoyne, with a touch of annoyance in her tone. "No matter what I say, she will not leave London on Saturday night. Really, Adrian, you must make her come to us when she promises."

Adrian said he wished she would come on Saturday evenings, because he wanted as much of her society as possible. "But trust me, she has her own good reasons for acting as she does," he added.

I held my tongue, rather glad to have my old chum to myself for this one evening.

She must have arrived exceedingly early indeed, because when I came downstairs in the morning—my Indian habits of early rising not having had time to deteriorate—I encountered a very pretty young person on the stairs. She wore a demure little cap and very fetching apron, while in her hand she carried a handsome travelling bag, with the initials, "V. F. V." in silver, on the side next me. Now, I have a sort of affinity with every pretty face I meet, a kind of brotherly tenderness for all womankind, especially when the member thereof brought under close observation for the time being is both pretty and young. Therefore I paused upon the stairs, and requested to be permitted to carry said bag to its destination, whereupon the damsel smiled and granted my request.

On the way to the first floor, I discovered that the owner of the comely face and bright eyes—did I mention the fact that she had bright eyes?—was Mrs. Vereker's personal attendant, and that she and her mistress had arrived by the first train from town. We parted upon good terms at the door behind which the fascinating widow was preparing for breakfast.

I did not mention the fact of my pleasant encounter when Adrian and I strolled out for our matutinal cigar after breakfast. There is no use in making people too wise.

We exchanged many confidences; and I found him still the same fine, honest, straightforward fellow as ever, also just as innocent of the ways of the world as he had been when his mother came to take care of him at Oxbridge long ago.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. VEREKER was charming—no question of it—very pretty, very well dressed, without an atom of “make-up” upon her fresh and still girlish face. Twenty-two, or possibly twenty-three, I set down as her age, but in experience she was far ahead of her years, unless I was mistaken in my estimate of her character.

She knew everything, was perfectly “up to date,” spoke with a pretty little accent—something not quite foreign, yet delicately turned, with a sweet unfamiliar ring about it; while upon my word, I never saw such a figure or a walk exactly like hers. It was grace itself, free, unstudied, undulating. You thought of a butterfly’s airy flight from flower to flower—of a swallow’s dip and rise on sweeping wings—as she went across the room, while the motion of her airy head and the pretty little gestures with which she emphasized her epigrammatic sentences gave a character to what she said in a way which puzzled me. She appeared such a perfect mistress of every turn of her supple body, every motion of her dainty feet. Such feet; they looked as if nature had fashioned them for dancing along flower-strewn ways rather than a homely trudge through a life of ordinary happiness in an old country house, with a simple-minded gentleman who adored her. She had very dark expressive eyes—a devil of mischief lurked in them I soon perceived. They were lovely deep grey in colour and had thick lashes on both lids. Her hair was so dark as to look black against her white throat, while her lips were ripe and red. Lucky dog, that Adrian! I envied the good old chap, but knew it vain to struggle against destiny.

We spent a pastoral Sunday, just as if we all belonged to a generation that had never heard of Hurlingham. The young squire and his betrothed wandering away from the old lady and myself, when we took our after-luncheon stroll. Heigho! Hard lines on the fellow who was out of it.

Curiously enough, in the afternoon, when Adrian and the widow were spooning in the garden, Mrs. Vereker’s maid took the air in the back shrubbery. I found her rather amusing com-

pany, although she refused to be "drawn" on the subject of her mistress.

In the evening Mrs. Vereker sang and played for us. Her songs were of course suited to the occasion, but it struck me that she could chant more lively ditties with telling effect. More than once the bright eyes wandered in my direction, and, out of madam's hearing, I ventured to perpetrate a small joke which she seemed to enjoy, but I did not like to interfere with Adrian.

She returned to London by the mid-day train next day; I remained at Dewylands, knowing she would return on Sunday.

That was a pleasant pastoral week, which I enjoyed. There were some pretty girls in the neighbourhood, and the time went by sweetly enough until the first day of the week following, when I again encountered Mrs. Vereker's attendant upon the stairs—this time not quite accidentally. She told me news which caused me mingled pain and pleasure. Her mistress had given her ankle a slight strain, and was ordered complete rest. She had come to Dewylands to find it. It gave me a wicked joy to remember this was the assize week in the county town and that Gascoyne would be absent for the best part of the time.

Certainly Mrs. Vereker made the most charming of invalids. She lay on a low couch in Mrs. Gascoyne's boudoir, wrapped in the most fetching of tea-gowns, all frills and furbelows, a most fascinating vision of womanhood. She sang for us, too, because she played the mandoline delightfully, and one must do something to pass the time. The more I sought to study her, the more of a distracting mystery she became, and the less I seemed to understand her, even while she occupied my thoughts more and more. To my disgust I felt that despite my sense of honour the little creature had captivated me, and, seeing the thing must be nipped in the bud, I invented a sudden call to town upon urgent business. They were all sorry when my approaching departure was announced. Mrs. Vereker darted one expressive glance at me through her long lashes, while Gascoyne made me promise to return at no distant date.

I said yes, vaguely, and went back to London.

There's always plenty to be done in the big city. I don't know any place in the world where one can get rid of one's time and money so easily, and it's quite wonderful how small one's fancied miseries appear amongst all the distractions one can

discover there. Before I had been a week in town I declare I had almost ceased to be pensive over Mrs. Vereker's dark eyes.

"I say, Parr, come along and have a lark." The speaker was an artless youth with more money than brains, who had recently joined our club and who really required some one to look after him. You see, it was not safe to let the lad wander round without a stern mentor at his elbow, and I acted the character upon more than one occasion. So I went. Our destination was the famous Capuan Hall of Varieties, the latest sensation in entertainments. There was a singer there who had the power of making you laugh or weep at will, they said, and a dancer whose agility was the talk of the town—not to mention certain lady vocalists, who bewitched the gilded youth with the charming freedom of their ditties. I wanted to see that the place was just what my youthful friend's mamma would approve of, you know, therefore I accompanied him to this palace of delight, as I had done to other forms of entertainment.

I rather think the songs were yelled rather than sung by girls who wore chiefly masculine array, when they wore anything worth mentioning over their tights. The male singers were either gruff or low, and the dancing—well, the dancing matched the singing.

All at once the lights went out, leaving but one glimmer of whiteness at the very back of the stage. There was a flutter and stir all through the audience, while the band played a soft, old-fashioned dance tune.

"What's up?" I inquired of my companion.

"Iris," he whispered breathlessly. "Didn't think she was back in the bill."

"Who is Iris?" I asked, rather impatiently. "Never heard of her."

"There she is," was the comprehensive reply.

Into the spot of light drifted something like a great snowy butterfly, with outstretched wings, lightly tipped with gold. It swayed to and fro in the dazzling ray, then flew towards the foot-lights. The music beat faster and faster, the white wings fluttering in the gleam, which suddenly changed to fiery gold; then the wings flew out into a sweeping cloud of rainbow colour, whirling in circle upon circle about the stage, while you caught tantalizing glimpses of exquisite limbs, of flying feet, and now

and then through the mist of iridescent colour, a peep of a graceful head, crowned by a rich coronal of golden hair.

I never saw such dancing. The grace, the agility of it, made me catch my breath and gaze in open-mouthed wonder at the light form as it flew about the stage; the core of a circle of rainbows which were flashing, swaying, rising, falling, in perfect time to the rhythm of the music. The limbs which the dancer freely displayed were perfect; the little feet models of beauty; the waving arms, which held the flying draperies in an airy clasp, rounded and white as the heart of a Malmaison rose. Through all, only now and then, a flashing glimpse of the face belonging to this most exquisite form could be seen, the glance being too brief to permit of your gaining a definite idea of it; only, there was a coronal of golden locks, some flowing loose over the white shoulders, and, just once, I saw that the dancer had exquisitely white teeth. I sat spell-bound as the dance proceeded, the dancer never a moment still. She flitted here and there about the great stage, always the core of a whirling mist of flying rainbows, always supremely graceful, supremely audacious, and also supremely enchanting. She marked every change of the music which rose and fell in dreamy cadences, each bar as it seemed having its own peculiar whisk of drapery, or some agile step of the rapidly-moving feet. The many-hued robes, all soft and flowing, one moment flew out like the wings of a great bird, the next were whirling in mad circles above the crown of golden hair, and again were spinning out, yards, as it appeared from her graceful limbs, in concentric circles; and all the time the stage was in darkness, except that part of it immediately under her feet. I never imagined anything so beautiful, so daring, so audacious; as for my companion, he was hoarse with shouting applause; in fact, the whole house rang with a perfect uproar of delight as the dancer went through a cancan—so wild, so daring, so graceful, that we were all on our feet cheering, shouting, gesticulating, almost mad with delight. In the midst of our enthusiasm the stage darkened and the velvet curtains swayed down.

“They may burst their throats with roaring, but she won’t appear again; she never does,” said my companion. “That’s the charm of her, the mystery she keeps round her. She dances here and at two other places in town. They say she’s making a

hundred pounds a night. See, half the chappies are off after her. The tantalizing thing is no one knows where she goes when she leaves here. She may have been at either of the other places before coming on at the Capua; or she may begin here, and end up somewhere else. Very likely she has been at both the other houses before this, to-night, as she is pretty late. Did you ever see anything like her?"

Frankly, I said I never had, then I asked her name.

"Iris, Mademoiselle Iris, that's all. No one knows anything about her. I know a chap that knows her agent, and he tried to pump the fellow, but to no purpose. Seems she thinks it pays to make a mystery about herself; certainly it does, because all London has gone mad over her."

I inquired if she had been dancing for any length of time.

"No," he replied. "She came out last spring, and at once took all before her. Knocked the rest of them out of court. She's making pots of money, and I'm certain she's as straight as straight. Fellow I know sent a heap of flowers and a diamond star to her one night. The things were pitched into his diggings next day by a man in livery, an old fellow that looked like a commissionaire, but wasn't. Are you off? Well, so'm I."

That night I dreamed that I was being united in the bonds of wedlock to the charming dancer, whose face was concealed by a rainbow mask.

CHAPTER III.

CURIOSLY enough, my mind was full of Mrs. Vereker when I awoke. I honestly confess that for a week I had not thought more of her than I could help, but upon this particular morning I was not surprised to find a note from her lying upon my breakfast-table.

"DEAR MR. PARR—it ran—

"If you have nothing better to do, will you give me the pleasure of your company at luncheon to-day? 1.30.

"Yours sincerely,

"VERE FLORENCE VEREKER."

I hastily despatched a messenger with a very effusive reply, and half past one found me at the door of the charming flat occupied by my friend's *fiancée*.

It was a perfect little nest of luxury, and the dear little old lady to whom she presented me—Mrs. Vereker, Senior—was the very picture of cosy old age. The luncheon provided was of the daintiest, and the wines she gave me proved that the widow had more than a superficial knowledge of things.

But it was the elder woman who did all the talking, Mrs. Vereker being strangely silent. I wondered why this was so, as I had hitherto found her voluble enough. After our charming meal came to an end, she ushered me into a fairy-like "den," and closing the door, bade me ensconce myself in the cosiest of arm-chairs, while she stood by the open door of a charming little conservatory upon which her boudoir opened.

She was silent for a few minutes, while I, at her bidding, lit a cigar, and in a general way made myself at home.

"I saw you last night," she began abruptly.

"Saw me?" I asked in amazement. "You saw me? Where?"

"At the Capua," she replied shortly.

I felt rather astonished, only I remembered that things had changed considerably during my prolonged absence from Europe, and that ladies did now go to music halls, when there were great attractions there. I said I had not thought of seeing her in such a place, but that I supposed she, as well as every one else in London, was drawn thither by the marvellous dancer. She waved her hand.

"You didn't see me?" she said with a harsh ring in her voice which I thought unfamiliar. "You did. Every one saw me, Mr. Parr; I am Iris."

If she had taken a revolver and fired it at my head, or suddenly flashed a knife at me, where I sat, I could not have been more taken by surprise. She, Adrian Gascoyne's betrothed, the wife chosen for him by his mother; the adored, idolized bride he hoped to bring to that spotless home! Iris, the dancer of the most startling cancan I could have imagined! This pale little woman, looking at me with that pitiful appeal in her eyes—she, Iris! No, the thing was quite impossible. She must have seen the incredulity in my face, because she went on hurriedly:

"It is perfectly true; I am Iris the dancer, who has turned the silly heads of all London—so they say—and who is earning a hundred pounds a night. Yes, I am she."

"But," I stammered, "how—why——" really I could not

shape the question on my lips. She looked down at me and laughed.

"How do I come to be Iris?" she asked. "I can tell you in a word. I was born to it. Yes, Mr. Parr, the woman who is to bear your friend's spotless name is the child of parents who danced for bread. My father was French; my mother, a dear, simple soul, taught me the only thing she knew: how to dance. At sixteen I had seen more than my share of the seamy side of life; I married to get out of it, having lost both my parents. Major Vereker was double my age; I thought he would be good to me. I made a mistake. No, he did not beat or starve me, but he taught me how great a brute a man can be, yet keep within the law. His old mother was good to me, only for that I should have gone mad. At length he was killed; killed in a railway accident, and I thanked God. But his death left us, his old mother and myself, destitute, and steeped to the lips in debt. It was then I returned to the old life, but not in the old way. I tried the dance which has become famous, and now I can command my own prices, and am mistress of the situation. I have managed to preserve the secret of my identity. No one could possibly connect Mrs. Vereker, the quiet little widow, who lives here in this ultra-respectable neighbourhood with her mother-in-law, who goes about in the simplest of costumes, who is engaged to a worthy country gentleman, and who is in every way the most retiring of womenkind, with Iris, the audacious dancer of the wildest cancan on the stage. The thing is utterly absurd. My good old mother-in-law knows I am on the stage, but has not the slightest idea in what capacity; the only people who are in the secret are my maid and her father, who used to be Major Vereker's orderly, and who is my watchdog now. I can trust them both."

"Mrs. Vereker," I said, "have you not told Adrian?"

She flashed a smile upon me. "Why should I tell Adrian?" she asked innocently; "there is no one to tell him; you will not betray me?" Certainly, she was a clever woman.

"No," I said. "There isn't much fear of that, only, others will not be so reticent; you must be found out."

She came a little nearer, and swayed, rather than bent, towards me.

"I have hedged myself round," she whispered; "my agent only knows me by my old name, my mother's name; he does not know of my marriage; no one knows me, I have kept every one at a distance. Of late, I have caused it to be spread abroad that I am in very bad health, and I believe that one reason for my great popularity is the idea, which is getting a hold upon the public, that one night I may drop dead in the midst of a wild fandango. It's horrid, but it's true."

I daresay my face expressed the disgust I felt for the crowd who flocked ghoul-like to gloat over such a tragedy, but I felt there was some truth in what she said.

"All this is very shocking," I said. "Believe me, Mrs. Vereker, your best policy is to be honest with the loyal man who wants to make you his wife. Send for him and speak out. It will be your safest, your wisest plan."

She looked away for a minute or so.

"Will you tell him?" she asked, in her low melodious voice. "Will your friendship bear such a strain? Remember, I am altogether in your power; I have, so to speak, given myself away to you."

"Mrs. Vereker."

"Call me Vere," she whispered, "just this once. Ah! if we had met sooner."

I did what any man under the circumstances would have done, and it was worth the doing; the remembrance of Gascoyne and my sense of honour flew away together. Everything was lost in the charm of that one kiss; I knew at the time I was a fool, but under the circumstances——.

"Now will you tell him?" she asked, as she stood at the window with heightened colour and brilliant eyes. "Go to him, bring him here, face to face with us both, and tell him I am Iris the dancer, if you—wish."

I know she had meant to end her sentence with another word, and that she dared me to do the thing she asked; also, I knew that the one stolen kiss had sealed my lips. Yes, she was a very clever woman.

"It would be better for you, having his interest at heart, to tell his mother, who, although she adores me, and the marriage is altogether of her making, would fling me off in horror, if she even thought I would sit by and look at the dance which has

become so celebrated," she said, still in her low-pitched voice. "I am quite prepared for it. Go!"

"Is this kind, Vere?" I asked. "Is it likely I would betray you? Have you so mean an opinion of me?"

When she turned her bright eyes on me they were filled with tears.

"I don't know, I have had very bitter experiences of men and things," she said. "But I am in your hands; do as you will."

I went to her side, and taking her hand, lifted it to my lips.

"You know you can trust me," I said. "Good bye."

That night I was on the way to Paris.

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE to say, I never found the brilliant capital so dull. Things appeared to have lost their savour, and no matter where I went, the soft eyes and little clinging hand of that dangerous widow haunted me. I heard nothing from her, neither did Gascoyne give me any information. I saw by the London papers that Iris was still in the bills of the big music halls, and that she was as much in vogue as ever.

After a fortnight of it, I returned to London, and, back once more in her neighbourhood, haunted the places where the lovely dancer appeared. In fact, I, a staid man in the thirties, was as enthusiastic over Iris as the veriest chappie in the big town.

"You're gone on her, that's a fact," said my youthful friend. "It's no use, old man; she's a mystery and a wonder, and she vanishes when her dance is over. Fellows have tried to follow her home, but it's no use, not a bit. Give it up, Parr; she wouldn't look at you."

But I could not give it up, and in the depths of my heart there was a wild wish that Gascoyne would come to town and see her in her true colours. What might not happen then?

I had my wish, and this is what occurred.

I met Gascoyne in the street one day. He had come to town to see his betrothed, and was dining at our mutual club.

After dinner he went quietly off, and I thought had gone home. To my utter amazement, he was the first person I saw upon entering the Capua, for my nightly feast of pleasing pain.

He was sitting in a rather out-of-the-way corner, and some swift intuition told me he did not wish to be seen. I also took a back seat, and waited. One thing after another went on upon the stage, song and dance, acrobatic performance, each fairly interesting of its kind, and then came the sensation of the night.

Never, never had Iris danced so well. Her grace, her audacity, the wildness of her exuberant spirits were unequalled, and through it all never a glimpse of her face could be seen.

"Isn't she going it?" said a voice behind me. "It's wonderful to see her dancing like that actually on the brink of the grave. I heard from a chap who knows a chap that knows her dresser that she has heart-disease, and may go off any minute. I'm following her round to see what'll happen, don't cher know."

But nothing happened upon that particular night, only I kept my eye on Gascoyne, and saw how he gazed at the figure flitting across the stage, with blazing eyes (some one has told him, I thought, some mean, low dog).

When the curtains swept down, and the lights blazed up again, the place where Gascoyne sat was vacant. I went softly round to the stage door, knowing my way. There was the modest little brougham standing as it had stood every night before; but now, when the door of the theatre opened, it was not the little closely-veiled form that emerged from it. No, a tall man in evening dress, whom I at a glance recognized, supported the little lady on his arm, and handing her into the carriage, stepped in after her and drove away.

Next morning, there were two announcements in the papers. One was that the celebrated dancer, Mademoiselle Iris, had suddenly bidden farewell to her brilliant career, in consequence of failing health. The other was, if possible, more startling, at least to me.

"At — church, Kensington, Adrian Gascoyne, Esq., Dewylands, Surrey, to Vere Florence Vereker, widow of John Vereker, late 30th Lancers. No cards."

I don't suppose any one in London, except myself, connected the two events.

On my table is lying a warm invitation to Dewylands, but I am very doubtful of accepting it. That fascinating little lady

made a fool of me once, and I don't want her to play tricks with me again. I hear that Adrian Gascoyne's wife has been received in the country with open arms, while the generally-received opinion in London is that Iris, the dancer, cheated the public and died in her bed after all. There's one thing I'd like to know: has Adrian ever told his mother? and, yes, I should also be glad to have another point cleared up. What the very correct youth thought of his bride in the character of Iris, and how the little lady mustered up courage to tell him the truth about herself. Or, dreadful thought! if he knew it all along, and that she made an utter fool of me. After all, I'm going back to India, and what does it matter?

H.M.S. Victoria,

A MIDDY'S STORY.

By EMILIA AYLMER GOWING.

Two brothers we were of our father's house
In the great Victoria's crew,
And light across her iron bows
Our merry laughter flew.

Right proud was our mother's heart that day
She watched our ship from land,
Like an island moved o'er the water-way,
By gallant Tryon's command.

Abaft our turret ribbed and steeled
Our Admiral stood tall,
To guide the Fleet o'er the sea's broad field,
The grandest man of all.

And now, full seventy fathom deep
Beneath the Syrian tide,
Good Sir George Tryon lies asleep
With my brother by his side.

For he was human, and once he erred,
By the fate of mortal lips,
And mistook our form when he gave the word
To turn the giant ships.

Who could misdoubt his wisdom, his skill ?
Not ours to disobey !
Had he bade us perish at his will,
No voice had said him nay.

“It will be all right,” we whispered, “who knows
His secret that sways the Fleet?—
Nay, surely, not as deadly foes
Shall our consort war-ships meet.”

One long, long minute before the crash,
We knew it—the worst must come—
“Back, back!” Too late—in a lightning flash
Destruction smote us dumb.

Not a lip was moved or uttered a sound
While the quivering ships lay still ;
They part—our splintered decks whirl round,
Our sinking port-holes fill.

And calm as the calm of that summer’s breath
Our Chief’s commands ring clear :
Every face set firm in the eyes of death,
We stand, we await, we hear.

Every hand fought hard for the great ship’s life ;
We headed for the shore
Ten measureless minutes of mortal strife,
While down and down she bore.

Still on we ploughed, till the rush of the flood
Had choked our labouring helm,
And caught us, man by man, where we stood
As a prey for the seas to whelm.

A lurch to starboard—a sudden surge—
I was struggling deep to my neck—
“To port, to port for your lives !” we urge,
As they piped all hands on deck.

Four deep they fell in, nor shrank, nor stirred
One man from his place, not one,
Till the last command, “Leap, leap !” was heard,
And we knew that all was done.

H.M.S. VICTORIA.

“Every man for his life, leap, leap!” Not so
 Was our Chief’s last word obeyed,
 Till the prisoners unbound, and the sick from below
 Upborne, on deck were laid.

And then I saw—oh, how shall I speak
 Of the godlike sacrifice?
 How the strong man yields his chance to the weak,
 How the nameless hero dies!

And last I saw, on the bridge above,
 Our gallant Chief stand tall;
 Till he sank with his ship not a step would he move,
 The one who died for all.

“It was all my fault,” he whispered low,
 As a wretch unfit to live
 Might hear his sentence falling slow
 From a judge who dared not forgive.

We had pardoned all to the friend we knew,
 As we gathered to his side;
 Not a man was there but, staunch and true,
 For his sake had gladly died.

Beneath the bridge a coxswain swung
 With a life-belt in his hand:—
 “No, save yourself,” the answer rung,
 In tones of proud command.

My brother met that sovereign eye
 For once—to disobey,
 As our last despairing signals fly:
 “Go, boy, you must not stay.”

“You youngsters, ’scape, I bid you both—
 The boats are at hand to save.”
 Then I thought of my mother’s sorrow, loth
 To waste the life she gave.

But my brother stood and made answer : " Sir,
I will follow where you go."
And neither spoke more, nor would either stir
And I saw them perish so !

One hand held hard with a mighty grip—
One hid the sight from his eyes,
As our Chief went down with his battle-ship,
And in her grave he lies !

'Twas scarce a moment—and I was aware
Of a wild and desperate fling,
A sinking, rushing through the air—
And I heard the waters sing.

Once I rose, and battled for breath
With a sea of men, sucked down
By the strangling ship in her throes of death—
Ah God ! was this to drown ?

Deep, deep, I sank through the crystal clear,
Till the light came green and dim ;
And a wind and wreckage swept me near,
And many a severed limb.

A boom of thunder—up, up quick !
A few faint struggling men ;
Where the stream of sinking life fell thick
We rose but nine or ten.

And lo ! before our failing sight
The vanished ship has fled ;
Down, down she beats in frantic fight
The hollow of her bed.

Up fly the waters' wrath and roar ;
We toss, we sink, we float ;
We were but left some three or four,
Snatched by the rescuing boat.

H.M.S. VICTORIA.

But dead or living, no, not one
Had spoken a word of blame
To cast a coward's reproach upon
Our brave Sir George's fame.

And when in face of England's foes
Her dear old flag we bear,
God grant us shipmates true as those
Who sank beside him there !

A Modern Egeria.

By GORDON ROY,

Author of "HIS COUSIN ADAIR," etc.

"MR. HUGH BOYD," announced the Auchenbeath butler. There was a distinct note of protest under the pompous official tone, which did not escape the over-sensitive ear of the visitor thus ushered in, and which did not tend to reassure him. He advanced a few steps uncertainly, confused by the semi-darkness of the room, contrasted with the broad blaze of the afternoon sunshine without, and by a sense of his own temerity in venturing there at all. Though familiar enough in his dreams with "cloud-capt towers and gorgeous palaces," Auchenbeath, a square, solid, old-fashioned country house, still seemed to him, as to the population of Loanhead generally, an abode of lofty and unexampled dignity and splendour. He threw a timid, hasty glance around, thinking for a moment that the room was empty. Possibly, in the half-light, it scarcely presented such a dazzling vista as he had expected to see; which could hardly be wondered at, seeing it was exactly such a drawing-room as one might have expected to find in that house—all stiff chintz and starched curtains, straight angles and primly-set chairs. But in the big low window at the further end of the room, which some former laird had thrown out in defiance of all architectural congruity, a different atmosphere prevailed. What specially produced it, it might have been rather hard to say. Whether it was the soft tones of the Persian rug that concealed so far the hectic tints of the carpet, or the Oriental cushions heaped on the old square sofa, or more likely the mere presence of the woman who lay luxuriously back amongst their rich, dusky-hued softness, a note of contrast was struck effectively enough.

As she slowly rose, a more sophisticated on-looker than Hugh would probably have pronounced her to be a singularly graceful woman, who knew how to make up for the absence of youth by

a skilful use of every advantage of tact and manner—above all, by every aid that dress could give; but to have regarded her through the grey eyes now fixed fascinated upon her would have been to let loose a whole flood of descriptive poetry. Even her dress, shimmering faintly yellow in the carefully-shaded light, seemed to the lad, as she came towards him down the long room, something “mystic, wonderful”—a garment such as mortal woman had never worn before, but whose softly-falling draperies were but the fitting raiment for a creature so benign and gracious, so utterly above and apart from his daily world; but then, to be sure, Hughie Boyd had never seen a tea-gown before.

“Ah, you have really come,” she said, holding out her hand. “Come and sit here,” leading him towards her sofa; “this is my own special nook.”

“So I could have fancied,” Hugh, to his astonishment, heard his own voice saying, and then he blushed at his boldness.

“Why, this is not so bad; the rustic has some comprehension,” thought Mary Cunningham, looking at him with a smile. Her visitor was a lad a little over twenty, in what proclaimed themselves at the merest glance to be his best clothes. His pale, rather irregular face was redeemed from the common-place by a pair of clear, strangely-luminous grey eyes—eyes which at times lacked something in steadiness of regard, and had an odd, wandering look in them. The ill-fitting coat hung but loosely from the sloping, slightly-stooped shoulders, and about both face and figure there was something which would make kindly women look after him with a little sigh, and men, if they chanced to notice it, dismiss him with an ejaculatory “Poor chap,” in which pity would be flavoured with a certain contempt.

“Now,” said Mrs. Cunningham aloud—“now, I hope you have remembered to bring some of your poems with you. Ah, that is right,” as Hugh tremblingly produced a little packet of papers, copied and re-copied in the dawning hours that morning. “You will read me something by-and-by; but, first of all, I want you to tell me all about yourself—*all*. No matter what great things a man may do, I think he himself is always more interesting than his work.”

Reserve is hardly a characteristic of a temperament like Hughie’s; but in ordinary circumstances he would probably have been too shy to speak much of himself. Now, however, the

novelty of being treated as an equal, of having secured not only a listener but a sympathetic one—most of all, perhaps, the fumes of the subtle, delicious flattery implied in Mary Cunningham's every word and look, produced a sort of mental giddiness and loosened his tongue.

After all, it was no uncommon story that Hughie Boyd had to tell. His type in lowly Scottish life is by no means such an unusual one as might be supposed from those sweeping generalisations which so conveniently supply the place of more exact knowledge of the habits and ways of any people. Curiously enough, there are few countries where the genus minor poet flourishes so largely as in cautious, prudent, hard-headed, "canny" Scotland, so-called. Every district, every village almost, can point to some lad like Hugh, whose keener perceptions and greater refinement of nature have found an almost inevitable vent in rhyme. The dialect alone, so flexible and so forcible, so easily manipulated, so marvellously expressive of homely humour or of simple pathos, offers an almost irresistible temptation to the versifier. As a result, the local press teems with slender, roughly-printed volumes, in which miner or mechanic, herd or ploughboy (for the Scottish Muse is no respecter of persons), gives to the world his *naïf* impressions of life, or breathes his budding passion while he vaunts the charms of Bess or Jean. But such volumes, though they may afford more recondite gratification, will assuredly never fill the poet's pocket; and, as a rule, this first effervescence safely expended, the rustic rhymester sinks back into common life again, and bids the Muse farewell. Hugh, however, was still lingering in the exasperating transition stage. For the hard life of the fields he lacked the physical strength, and his friends had neither the means nor the inclination to help him to any career more suited to his bent of mind. With the fine frankness which prevails in that rank of life, he had been given to understand plainly enough that until he had proved himself a second Burns, he had better try his hand at something more remunerative than poetry, as his father's house was no place for "dae-naethin' gentry."

All this, from his own point of view of course, the lad poured out in rapid, passionate words. He spoke with a sort of rage of the "place" that had lately been found for him, of the long hours in the colliery office, where the air was grimy with coal-

dust and shaken by the ceaseless thumping of the pit-engine. Home was little better, though "his mother," and here the eager young voice softened a little, did what she could for him, but sturdy brothers and sisters, eager, after their "day's darg," for such diversions as Loanhead could afford, regarded the moody, brooding lad and his inexplicable ways with careless contempt. Blunt and dull as they might be in other respects, they could fully appreciate the absurdity of a poor colliery clerk cherishing such aspirations as Hughie's.

As Mrs. Cunningham listened, and watched the grey eyes brighten and the slack, drooping figure knit itself more erect, her amused languid interest passed into something more genuine.

"And that has been your life!" she exclaimed, as he paused for a moment. "Oh, dear me!" and she let her hands drop by her sides, as if under the pressure of some intolerable burden, while the swift, tinkling, downward rush of the quaintly-carved and twisted bangles with which the slender arms were loaded, seemed to echo and to emphasize the dreary fall of her voice.

"That has been my life—yes," he broke out again, "but do you think that I am content to be buried here, and only to dream of what life—*real* life—might be? And even that I was trying to give up, trying to believe that no other lot was possible for me, trying to listen when they preached duty and contentment to me, and the gratitude I ought to feel for being put in the way of earning enough to keep me from starvation. But it is my soul they would have me starve, and I'll be guilty of that no longer. You don't know what you have done for me. It was as if the grave were closing over me, and I had no strength to cry out, but you have given me new life——" The lad suddenly paused abashed. "I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, "I shouldn't speak so to you." He looked down, and his eyes fell upon the little packet of papers. With a sudden start he looked round at the twilight that was rapidly falling, and then, with a sort of dismay, into Mrs. Cunningham's face. With all her sympathy, she could hardly suppress a smile. He was pining to read them, of course, but, with a glance towards the clock, whose dial was already all but invisible, the dressing-bell would ring almost immediately, and they were so dreadfully punctual at Auchenbeath.

"Leave them with me," she said, holding out her hand. "I shall read them for myself. After all, that will be better, for I shall be able to form a less biased opinion. Oh, I will let you know what I think."

"But it is too much," hesitating. "I have no right to trouble you so; but oh," with sudden eagerness, "if I thought there was a chance for me, if I could but once get a hearing——"

"And you shall get it. Unless I am very much disappointed in these," fluttering over the papers, "and something tells me I shall not be disappointed, I can bring them under the notice of some people who might be of use to you by-and-by, when you go to London. Of course you will go—you won't be able to help it. It is the great magnet that will draw you in spite of yourself. Oh yes, you shall have your chance; we will make it for you," gaily. "But why—why," with a sudden change of voice, "oh, poor boy, have you known so little kindness, then, that a word should be too much for you?"

Poor Hugh! He was not strong save on the emotional side of his nature, and the possibilities which those few words opened up all but overpowered him. What he might have said or done next it is hard to say, but at that moment the door opened and some one with a firm, not to say heavy, tread came in.

"Bless me, why are you sitting like owls in the dark?" exclaimed a hearty voice. "But whom have you got here?" coming nearer the window. The fading light showed a stout, middle-aged lady, whose fresh, homely comeliness and stiff, rustling black silk, that had been fashionable several years ago, proclaimed the mistress of Auchenbeath and its drawing-room.

"Oh, it's you, Hughie. And how's your mother, decent body? Did my mixture do her any good? I am sure she'll be proud that you've got such a good place at the pits. I know I was when Mr. Cunningham told me he had got it for you, and it is no easy job, I can tell you, Hughie, to get places for lads that have been brought up to nothing in particular and can't take to the pick or the plough like their neighbours. And I hope you'll remember that, Hughie, and try and be a comfort to your poor mother, and a credit to those that have taken such pains on your account." All this was delivered in a loud, cheerful, admonitory tone, such as some people adopt towards a fractious child.

reply to jeers at her choice, or hints that she was throwing herself away. Needless to say that in Hugh's dreaming brain no such idea had taken any concrete shape. To some men the companionship of women is almost a necessity, and he had been diligently trying to idealize Lizzie, to call her rough manners and blunt ways adorable simplicity, and to transform her vigorous, full-blooded personality into the typical rustic nymph so abundantly besung.

Now when she shook him by the arm he was awakened indeed. Fresh from the presence of that embodied grace, those slender arms and eloquent hands, the radiance of that rare slow smile, he stared at his rustic Egeria aghast, at her square strong frame, her healthy depth of chest, her broad honest ruddy face. Good heavens, where had his eyes been, and his ears too? The arm which Lizzie still held hung limp by his side. He could find no words to answer her questions about Auchenbeath, and the grand London lady who would doubtless do something for him, since she had invited him to "The House."

"What's come ower ye, lad?" she asked wistfully at last, and then the floodgates were opened. All the latent rebellion, stirred to a seething ferment by the emotions of the last hour, broke out. Lizzie was not too dense not to understand him now. They were leaning over a rough wayside gate, and she drew away from him a little as the boy spoke fiercely of his disgust with his present life and his determination to break away from it somehow.

The girl listened in silence, instinctively putting one big roughened hand over her mouth to hide the working of the full red lips. It was needless, as far as her companion was concerned. He was far enough from thinking of her at the moment.

"What'll ye'r folk say? They'll be awfu' ill at ye for giein' up ye'r place," she said bluntly, when Hugh was forced to pause a moment for breath.

He flung back his head superbly. Was it not against that very "place," and the determination of his "folk" to chain him down to it, that his whole nature was rebelling?

"An' hoo are ye tae leeve in a muckle place like Lunnon? I kenna about they things, but they'll no bring out a buik in a day, I'se warrant."

This went home. The boy's soaring hopes tumbled earthward like a shot bird, a mere mass of crumpled feathers.

"Couldna the ledly help ye, since she's that muckle ta'en up wi' ye?" went on the girl in the same bitter, sullen tone.

"She! Great heavens, I ask for money from *her!*" he said savagely. "But of course you do not understand," he added, after a moment, in a different tone. After all, how could she know that she was laying rude hands on sacred things? "Oh, I'll manage somehow. I can't expect success all at once of course. I'll have to work and wait like other people, and in a great place like London there must always be openings. If I were but once there, once on the spot, I'd get on, never fear."

"Ye're sure of that?" said Lizzie heavily, turning and looking at him, at the boyish figure, now only a darker outline against the dusk. The shoulders seemed to have lost their stoop, the head was held more erect.

"As sure as of my life, though perhaps that's no great security," he said, with a laugh; "but I'm not there yet," voice and head drooping again involuntarily.

Lizzie turned away again. Some dim struggle was going on in the girl's half-awakened mind. What the inward tumult that was shaking her was, rage or grief or yearning, she did not know. Life in Loanhead did not tend towards introspection. She stood still for awhile, breaking some rotten splinters off the old wood-work and flinging them away, before she spoke again.

"Aye," she said slowly; "I dinna unnerstaun' muckle, but I can unnerstaun' this. Ye're no strong, Hughie, an' work's chancy in toon as weel as kintra; but if ye maun gang, as ye *wull* gang, I'm thinkin', this time, ye canna gang wi' naethin'."

Hugh turned sharply round. "What do you mean?"

"Just this, Hughie," breathing loud and hard: "I have been at work sin' I was a wean. Auntie's no needin' ma fee; noo, ma man——"

Hugh flung off her hand. "Lizzie, what do you take me for? I take your money——"

"An' what for no?" said the girl composedly, though she shut her eyes tight as if she could banish the vision she had so often dwelt upon—the blankets, the clock, and—dazzling possibility—a shining mahogany chest of drawers even. "What for could ye no tak' it? Ye can gie it me a' back again when—when ye're a great man, an' a'bod's prood tae ken ye," with an odd explosive sound something between a strangled laugh and a blubbering sob.

"Eh man, Hughie, it's you that disna unnerstaun," cried out the woman's heart at last, as she turned and stumbled off into the darkness, her clumsy shoulders heaving with the big sobs that would be choked down no longer.

* * * * *

The new year had come in, bleak and dark and cold, and still day by day the brown clammy blanket of fog seemed to press down heavier and heavier, choking the throat, making the eyes smart, and doubling the toil of many a poor labouring pair of lungs that were but drawing in death with every gasping breath.

"Ugh, what a cough," said one man to another as a young fellow brushed past them. "A day or two more of this will finish off that poor devil, and the rest of us too, I think, unless the fog lifts soon."

But for that day, at least, the fog had evidently no intention of lifting. To the westward it was as dense as it had been in the City, and down by the river the chill darkness grew thicker and thicker, till the lad, struggling on and on, felt as if he were forcing his way through some palpable obstruction. Still he pushed on, like one to whom the way was familiar, in spite of the bewildering mist, till he stopped suddenly opposite a house on the Embankment. The ghastly cough returned, rending its way through the poor diseased lungs, and he clung to the railings, slimy with the ooze of the fog, till the paroxysm was over for the moment. He did know his way to that house well. Many a time he had stood outside its door since his first visit to it. Was it months or years ago since then? Since that bright autumn day when, in a fever of hope and expectancy, with that mighty rush of life all around, not yet become a terror to him, firing his young blood, he had stood at *her* door at last. With the blank disappointment of a child almost, he had learned from the frowsy caretaker, summoned with difficulty from some unknown depths, that Mrs. Cunningham would not be at home until the beginning of the year.

And yet why should he be so disappointed? he had said to himself as he had walked away. Why should he not take his fate into his own hands? He had three months before him. What might not be done in three months? Instead of seeking

her aid, might he not bring his first laurels to lay at her feet? Everything had seemed possible then under that blue rain-washed sky, and with the river full-fed after a September storm rushing broad and strong by his side.

And since then? Well, since then he had been through the mill. He had learned what London is. A friendless, all but penniless lad, dropped as if from the sky into that whirlpool; dreaming of fame, and with the poems which were to secure it at a bound all neatly copied out and ready—the situation explains itself; what need to enlarge?

As the weeks and months went on he had wandered back to that house again and again, if only to gaze aimlessly at the blank, shuttered windows. But to-night the house was blank and silent no longer. Through the closed curtains a gleam of light struggled out yellow through the fog, and he clutched the railing tighter, torn by an inward debate that was fiercer than the tearing cough. To ask her charity—not her help, her influence, her sympathy—but her charity, that was what it had come to. What would he have thought of that once? But between then and now there was a great gulf fixed. Money he must have, if he were to secure a shelter against the on-coming night, some place where he might cough his life away. Oh, if it might have been at home in his old attic under the roof, with the little four-paned window in the gable, over which the big apple-tree stretched its branches. How often he had looked out on a spring morning through its pinky mist of blossoms to the early blue. Well, that could never be again. Above the muffled roar of the distant traffic he heard his father's hard hoarse laugh again, heard him say to the poor trembling mother hanging on her boy's neck in the anguish of parting:

“Hoots, wumman, ye needna pit yersel sae muckle aboot. We'll hae Hughie back in a week or twa when his pocket's empty. *He* dae any guid in Lunnon! He hasna set the Seggan here on fire, an' I'm thinkin' he'll no pit a light to the Thames. Oh, ay, he'll be back again like the bad penny that's aye turnin' up.”

No, he could not go home again, even if he had the money to take him. Go home after he had spent Lizzie Cochrane's money, with nothing to show for it! And against the gloom, every one of those dirty one-pound notes, hot and crumpled from Lizzie's

sweaty palm, seemed to photograph themselves before the lad's burning eyes.

No, he could never go home again! And yet, oh, if he might! To look again into his mother's faded eyes that could still brighten for him, to feel her hands on his hair——

Suddenly he drew himself erect. Why should he despair like this? Mrs. Cunningham would, *must* be able to help him. Could she have been so heavenly kind to him only to cast him off in his need? What might she not be able to do for him? Why should he limit his hopes to that miserable money, dire though his need for it was? Courage! He quitted his grasp of the railings, gave a last desperate downward glance at the clothes which had been brushed till they would brush no more, and mounted the steps.

The door opened. The servant ran his eye over the lank, buttoned-up figure, blurred by the fog.

"Not at home!" he said sharply before Hugh's dry tongue could articulate a word.

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed Hugh, putting his hand on the closing door. "I *must* see Mrs. Cunningham," he said insistently. "Tell her it is Hugh Boyd from Loanhead, and I know that she will see me. It is—it is very important."

The man looked at him doubtfully. "Very well," he said slowly, "I'll take your message, but I'm sure Mrs. Cunningham can't see you, she's got company. You can wait there if you like," indicating the door-mat. Hugh hardly heard him. When the man turned away he followed him across the hall and up the stair. The long struggle, the tumult of hope and dread, of pride and shame, weakness of body and nervous tension strained to the utmost pitch, all combined to produce a sort of mental confusion. Beyond the unspeakable physical relief of breathing this warm fragrant air, compared with the chill, soot-laden fog, he was hardly conscious of his surroundings. A vague impression of dim, rich colouring, and strange fantastic shapes that seemed oppressively crowded together, was all that his mind could take in. They paused in a little ante-room, lit by a quaint hanging lamp. The man angrily waved Hugh back, and lifting a heavy curtain, let in a stream of brilliant light and a gush of talk and laughter. Then the curtain dropped again and Hugh was alone. Presently he heard his own name repeated,

wonderingly at first, and then with more certainty. That voice thrilled through the semi-stupor into which he had fallen, and instantly every faculty seemed to be concentrated in hearing. Whether he had any right to hear, it never occurred to him to inquire.

"Hugh Boyd! Oh dear me, what has brought the foolish boy here?" said a woman's voice with a little plaintive note in it.

"And who may Hugh Boyd be, if one may ask? Some other poor wretch, who has taken a pretty speech of Mrs. Cunningham's for gospel?" said a man's voice, with an under-current of meaning beneath the light tone.

"Oh, poor fellow, he is a poet and a genius, in his own estimation at least, whom I encountered when I was doing penance at Auchenbeath last autumn. You don't know my husband's worthy relatives, or you would understand the situation better; but you may conceive to what a condition I was reduced when, as a distraction, I let our untaught genius discourse to me of his struggles and aspirations. I believe he left some of his effusions with me, but what I did with them I do not know—left them behind at Auchenbeath, I am afraid, in the joy of my escape. But after all, one cannot be expected, any more than magazine editors, to return stray poems. It is rather hard on me now, though, that because I did not absolutely yawn in his face, he should come charging up to town in this fashion, expecting me, I suppose, to introduce him to fame and fortune off-hand. I must certainly cultivate rudeness, if this is the result of a little civility."

"It might be better for both parties in the long run," gravely. "Pretty speeches, as well as curses, have at times an awkward habit of coming home to roost. But what do you propose to do now with the untaught one?"

'Oh, how can I tell?' half-irritably. "What could any one do?"

"Let him down as gently as you can at least, poor devil. After all, he is not so very much to blame for supposing that you were in earnest. It is a mistake that a good many people seem to make—very tiresome of them, to be sure. But," hesitating a little, "perhaps I might see him for you. One is apt to associate ideas of a garret and a crust with gentlemen of his class—and on a night like this——"

"Oh no, no!" hastily; "I am afraid it would only hurt him,

and I don't fancy there can be any need." Then, with a change of voice, "Simmons, tell Mr. Boyd that I cannot see him this evening, but that if he is making any stay in town, I shall be pleased to see him by-and-by."

"Yes, 'm," and the curtain was raised again—but the ante-room was empty. So was the hall, and through the open door a wave of fog came eddying in.

"Taken himself off, has he? Showed more sense than could have been expected. Well, there's the last of that one, anyhow, *I'm* thinking," said Simmons to himself with a queer look of amused comprehension. "Ugh, it's a cut-throat night and no mistake. There ain't no keepin' of that fog out nohow," with a choke and a shiver, as he banged the door.

And Hugh—out into the night, away into the blackness, anywhere—what did it matter now?—the lad had rushed in the shock of this utter hideous shattering of his dream. From out that lighted doorway behind him, jeering faces, mocking voices seemed to come thronging after him, and, mingling with them, these light, half-laughing tones that had slain heart and hope within him at a blow. He fled from them like a madman. If he could but have fled from himself and from memory!

No, there could be no home-going now, all that was at an end. If only life might end too—Ah, what was that? A sudden shock sent him reeling and gasping backward. Instinctively he stretched out a groping hand in the darkness. The obstruction was solid—it was a wall.

Where was he? His hand slipped over into space, and then he stood for a moment listening.

Yes, he knew where he was now. It was the parapet of the Embankment, and on the other side—down there—the black, unseen waters were lapping—

Trixie.

By R. M. BURNAND.

“All precious things discover'd late,
To those who seek them issue forth ;
For love in sequel works with fate,
And draws the veil from hidden worth.”

Tennyson.

“TRIXIE, dear, I met Roger Humphreys this afternoon in the village. He wants us to go and dine there to-morrow evening ; he has some friends staying,” said Mrs. Maynard to her daughter as they sat in the porch one lovely August evening.

“Oh ! ah, you are going, mother dearie ?” inquired her daughter, while a slight colour tinged her cheeks.

“Of course, dear. He is always so kind. It was a short notice, as he remarked, but he said we are such old friends he knew I would not consider it rude. He was in the village seeing after old Martha. What a good heart that man has !”

“Mother, you will make his ears burn to-night ; he has certainly a warm admirer in you,” said Trixie, smiling ; but she lowered her eyes so that their happy expression should not be noticed.

“One can't help but admire a man like Roger Humphreys. I only wish——”

“Don't wish, mother ; they say it is the idlest thing to do. Besides, you should never speak your wish aloud.” Trixie spoke in a jesting manner, to cover the real feeling she had, not to hear her mother express what she knew to be her desire. It was a little play, and both knew it was so ; the mother was used to being fenced with when she was talking of Roger Humphreys. In her own heart Trixie acknowledged he was worthy of all praise, but she would not own it even to her mother. She had learnt he was true and good, but it had been a lesson learnt hardly and through pain.

“You must wear your pretty pink, Trixie, and there are some lovely roses just out that will look well with it,” said her mother,

changing the conversation, seeing, as usual, that some matters are not advanced by talking of them ; and she was nearly saying more than she intended.

“ You are an extravagant little mother ! Well, perhaps, as he has visitors, I will give them a treat and wear my best frock. I am just going round to see that the new puppy is properly shut up for the night,” said Trixie, getting up from the low basket chair ; in passing her mother bent to kiss her ; then went slowly down the path, while her mother followed her movements with eyes that saw with a mother’s fond heart.

Trixie Maynard was a very pretty girl, with a sunny face and a bright, loving nature. Her eyes, of a deep-tinted blue, looked out at you from behind long shading lashes, whilst dimples played hide-and-seek round a very dainty mouth. Until two years ago her life had been cloudless sunshine, and she had been as a gay-coloured butterfly flitting about life’s garden, enjoying the flowers whilst the thorns were hidden.

Her father had been in the army, but on his death her mother had retired with her child, then only eight, to the little Devonshire cottage in which they still lived—an ivy-covered cottage, with roses and clematis growing in luxuriance over its porch. It was an ideal spot. The hum of the busy world seemed as though it would never make itself heard in such an abode of peace. It was an old-fashioned garden, where flowers were allowed to grow in Nature’s bountiful luxury : tall white lilies reared their heads in innocent pride, filling the air with their heaven-laden scent. Both mother and daughter loved their garden ; they could often be seen working busily, looking after the flowers with tender care. In such a place these two women were utterly out of the big world of society, but naturally they had the usual sprinkling of county society, which, though small, gave them periodical mild entertainment and amusement. Their greatest friend was Roger Humphreys, of Treden Hall, a bachelor of about thirty-five, and therefore a mark for all the arrows of the gay Dianas and their mammas ; but he had been proof so long that they unanimously decided he was not a marrying man. Roger Humphreys had his own idea on the subject. He had seen Trixie grow up and develop into a lovely girl, and gradually he discovered that he wanted more than her friendship, but he feared she had never looked upon him with other eyes than

those of a dear friend. Mrs. Maynard guessed his secret and would have been content to confide her child to a man she knew so well. She was often afraid that Trixie might unknowingly pass by such an honest heart for a more striking and dazzling love, which would bear the stamp of novelty. For no doubt, to Trixie at twenty, Roger Humphreys' thirty odd years made him appear almost old. He knew she only regarded him as a friend, and he meant to wait and teach her otherwise. But love sometimes grows impatient; he saw the flower which he longed to wear, and his hand stretched out eagerly to pluck it. One day he unwisely spoke his longing. Trixie was overcome with surprise. She was as one of her own garden lilies and could not fathom this wonderful love, which quite changed her old friend. She told him she did not care for him in the way he wanted; perhaps, she said, it might come, but in the meanwhile they would be friends. Roger had to be content, and so he remained her staunch friend as of old; and though he forbore ever by any gentle reminder to annoy her with his love, yet it was there just the same, and he hoped with a strong hope. Yet it was not quite the same friendship for the girl. His words had awakened her from the light, careless sleep of youth and brought into life many thoughts and dreams which had not been before. Shyly she told her mother. Mrs. Maynard questioned her without trying to put any ideas of love, nor did she urge the excellent advantages of such a good marriage; and much as she longed for the union, she in no way tried to force what might be a mistake in life. Mrs. Maynard was one of those women on whom the world had made but little effect. She had her own opinions: they might be called old-fashioned ones, but she clung to them; and she did not believe in her child merely making a match. Mrs. Maynard had taught Trixie to live through life with an honest regard for what is noblest. They both, perhaps, were inclined to idealize. Better that than sink to the lower level, which seems to see in the world only land and water and human beings—people wandering about aimlessly, without any idea of whither they are tending. She knew that Trixie must learn it all for herself, but she hoped these lessons would bear fruit in later days, when thorns must come among the flowers. And so Mrs. Maynard left things as they were, content to know that Trixie had no thought for any of the young men she knew, but as yet was happier alone with

her mother and her garden. This all happened two years ago ; since then Trixie had tasted of other pleasures, and learnt the bitter-sweet of life's teaching which made the girl become a woman.

Mrs. Maxwell, an aunt on her father's side, suddenly announced her intention of paying them a visit. She arrived in the autumn. A lively, fashionable woman, who looked about twenty-five, at least to Trixie, comparing her with her mother, but then Trixie had not been initiated in the uses of art *versus* age and nature. In reality she was about forty-five, or more, as her friends kindly added with a little "ahem!" which means so much more sometimes than even the truth. She brought a new element. It was as if a wind had rushed in that peaceful garden, and whirling round caught up everything that lay in its progress, and then as suddenly would disappear and all would be the same except for a few marks here and there. She fascinated Trixie, and for the time made her feel that the little Devonshire village was simply a forgotten spot in the world. It gave her a longing to taste of the life of pleasure her aunt depicted. Mrs. Maxwell invited her to come in the early spring and stay for some of the season in town.

Mrs. Maynard did not quite approve of her sister-in-law. Still, it was an opportunity for the girl to see a little, and even while dreading to let her go without the safe company of her mother, she accepted, and Trixie was to go and try her wings alone. Of course Mrs. Maxwell had not been long in Fernhurst before she discovered that her niece might be mistress of Treden Hall. It gave the girl more importance in her eyes. Mrs. Maxwell, having married a man considerably older than herself for no other motive than of being comfortably settled, could not understand any young woman refusing an eligible offer simply because she did not feel she could give the man the love he wanted. Mrs. Maxwell told her sister-in-law that it was really Trixie's duty to accept Treden Hall and its owner. She put the possessions first as of being the most importance ; Mrs. Maynard put them last. Mrs. Maxwell shrugged her shoulders and thought that life in a simple village had a deteriorating effect ; she began to long for London gas and electric light. Mrs. Maxwell was not a bad woman, only utterly of the world and thoroughly permeated with its maxims, and she failed to understand any other existence. Still, the glimpse she had of the life of this mother and daughter

brought back thoughts of old forgotten days when she too had dreamed of better things ; but she had never been strong to fight the current, and so in the rush of the world those ideals had been lowered and she had drifted on the restless sea of society, losing sight of any real haven in the satisfying of ambitions. Those memories were uncomfortable ; so she gladly shook them off. She wanted to see Trixie more worldly, and she knew a little of London society would do it most effectually, and there probably she would learn that a place like Treden Hall was not to be despised. She fancied, perhaps, the easy-going morals and manners of the usual run of society men and women would possibly astonish her old-fashioned ideas.

Mrs. Maynard saw her daughter go, and she felt that her child would not return quite the same. The mother's heart dreaded a newer love, and she longed more than ever that her daughter should learn to know Roger Humphreys as she knew him to be.

Trixie made her *début* under her aunt's chaperonage. The London to which she was introduced was a different London to that of her old girlish days, when it meant visiting the interests of bygone times. This was a world of pleasure, and Trixie sometimes felt as though her life in that quiet cottage and garden was all a dream. A pretty girl under the care of a woman who loves life has splendid opportunities. Trixie thoroughly enjoyed herself. She did not half understand the people and often experienced a kind of mental shock, but she remained untouched and all her aunt's teaching fell on unheeding ears. She met many men, and at last one came who seemed to realize all her girlish pure ideal. Trixie felt the world more beautiful. Mark Ferrers was a man well calculated to win the love of a simple-minded girl, who, judging others from her own straight honest standpoint, thought them the same and did not know of hidden depths. Wickedness and misery were more abstracts to her than vivid realities, but gradually she was being awakened. Mrs. Maxwell, noticing that Ferrers seemed attracted by her niece, gave her a kindly warning, laughing at his love of flirtation and that he never meant anything seriously. Still, she thought that probably the girl would have to find it out for herself, as most girls did, and then perhaps she would find Roger Humphreys more desirable. In her infatuation, which she dignified with the title of love, Trixie saw in the tall fair-haired man a hero and

her aunt's remarks appeared utter libels. Mark Ferrers was certainly no hero—only a selfish man of the world who at first was fascinated by the girl's beauty ; but insensibly her simple dignity of innocence affected him more powerfully than he cared to own, till he almost hesitated and thought that such a wife could be a man's angel. The hesitation was only for a moment, for Trixie's beauty was her only fortune, and Mark Ferrers intended to marry money, and would not allow heart to interfere with his admirable programme. He had already forged the golden chain that should bind him, and there was but a link more to rivet it entirely, but he could not forego the pleasure of Trixie's company, shutting out all thought of her girlish life being spoilt. She never detected the false ring in his sentiments ; she believed him all he professed and offered him the sweet incense of her admiration. Her mother remarked the changing tone of her letters and suspected that the man whose name so often occurred occupied a large share of her daughter's thoughts. She could only hope he was worthy of them.

Roger Humphreys visited her now and again, but he felt somehow his presence was not wanted and that he was better away. He returned to wait till she should be back in her own Devonshire home. He was dreading to hear that some other than he should win her, but his love was generous and he desired her happiness even at the cost of his own. Strangely, during his visits he had not come across Ferrers, so knew nothing of their flirtation. Roger was acquainted with Ferrers and would have said he was not a man to make any girl happy, least of all Trixie, whose character was too high-souled to be mated with one who would crush it utterly. So Roger came back unconscious that any one was usurping the place he longed to occupy. Trixie lived in a fool's paradise for many happy weeks, but the inevitable awakening came and her idol fell. It was no tragedy—only a man preferring wealth to the pure love he could have taken into his life, and he knew what he was doing. Cowardly, he had reckoned on keeping both, but Trixie was not sufficiently of his world to understand the drift of such dishonesty. No false lessons had spoilt the whiteness of her soul. When the truth had been revealed to her by others she demanded its denial from him, but he could not give it, but strove to make it half a truth by pleading excuses. But she was proud and

resented the insult of his deception. She said little, made no reproaches, but calmly showed him that no longer was she the simple girl he had thought her. As he left her he regretted what he had lost, as her strength and courage had increased his respect and admiration, and selfishly he cursed his bad luck and forgot his own coward's heart which was his undoing. His vanity made him imagine that probably she would waver and he should return as her lover; but he erred, for Trixie never made any sign of a desire to alter her determination. Mrs. Maynard never quite learnt the truth, but she guessed something had happened, for her child returned a woman and her light-hearted gaiety was often forced. Her mother trusted to time's gentle healing to chase away the shadows that had come across the sunshine. Trixie felt as though the whole fabric of her life was upset and that never again should she care to rebuild it. But gradually, as the year went by and a new summer dawned, the old life re-asserted itself and Trixie began to find the same interests as before. Together, she and her mother wandered about their little garden, and Trixie told her she was happier in that spot far away from the restless spirit of the world. Poor girl, she had had such a shock that she imagined the world was only fair away from the busy throngs; she forgot that it would be fair and bright everywhere, were it not for the malice which others use to mar its beauty. And her mother pointed out to her that truth and faith could be found even amidst uncongenial surroundings every bit as much as in secluded spots. For the world is ourselves and what we are, so we each make our world and carry it with us.

Roger Humphreys came more often, and the girl felt a revivifying influence in his tender care and unassuming affection. She was rather annoyed with herself when she began to find how much her thoughts were occupied with him. Now and again it struck her that the qualities with which she had endowed Mark Ferrers had been the qualities which she had unconsciously admired in the man she had once refused.

Some such thoughts were in her mind as she stood dressed for the dinner at Treden Hall. She half wished she were not going, for an unaccountable shyness often took possession of her in Roger's presence; she dreaded his discovering how much she thought about him. The truth had suddenly come to her that his dark face was growing very dear to her and was completely

driving out all other memories, and she felt she was weak in admitting a new love so soon—in fact she felt as though she must possess a very fickle nature. Trixie was a conundrum to herself just then.

“Well, mother, do you approve?” said Trixie, standing before her in a soft pink silk, relieved with fresh-gathered roses as her ornaments.

“Yes, darling, it looks very nice, that pink is so pretty,” said Mrs. Maynard, looking with a mother’s admiring eyes at her child, and to-night she was a picture of dainty youth.

“I wonder who is there?” speculated Trixie, as she and her mother were driving along in the fly, the only one the village boasted.

“I don’t know, dear; he didn’t say, except that his sister was to come yesterday; no doubt the party from Whit Court. They always have a lot of visitors.”

“Well, all I hope is that some one entertaining will take me in. It is so hard to get on with some men. They seem to think it is the woman’s duty to provide amusement during dinner, whilst they just remark ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ and are contented, believing they have done their duty,” and Trixie gave a comical smile at her mother. “And, mother, we deserve two nice young men, for you look so sweet, dear, and I am sure I am worthy of attention.”

“Conceited little person!” said her mother gaily, happy in her heart to see her girl so bright. It seemed a good omen for Roger.

When they were announced they found all the guests arrived, and in the half-light it was difficult at first to recognize faces. Their host came forward with a welcoming smile, and Trixie felt at ease as her small hand was taken in his strong protecting grasp.

“Now, Trixie, I must introduce the man who is to take you in to dinner. I will fetch him.” Roger went across the room and returned followed by a man whose tall figure she seemed to know too well.

“Mr. Ferrers, Miss Maynard!” said Roger, and in the twilight did not notice the flush that rose to Trixie’s cheeks, nor its succeeding pallor as she bowed to the man she had hoped never to meet again. She saw that Ferrers was in doubt of her greeting.

“I have met Mr. Ferrers before,” was all she vouchsafed in a

slightly haughty tone. She gave him her hand, thinking it might look odd if she refused it. Roger remarked her voice and wondered at its unusual tones, but he had to go and take up his duties as host, so had to relinquish his place by her side.

"Miss Maynard, I did not know till this evening that I was to have the pleasure of seeing you again," said Mark Ferrers, hesitating slightly on the word "pleasure" as he looked at the proud young face, her eyes returning his gaze with a cold, hard expression, making him think how soft he knew they could look.

"No, I don't suppose you even remembered that I ever lived in this part of the world. Are you staying here?" inquired Trixie, hoping he was not visiting Roger, as then avoidance would be so difficult.

"Not in this house ; I am at Whit Court," he answered, giving her his arm to follow the others into the dining-room. As they came out under the lamp-light he remarked she was even prettier than the girl he remembered two years ago.

"Have you not forgiven me yet?" said Ferrers in a low tone.

"I had nothing to forgive, Mr. Ferrers ; you were perfectly free to do as you like. And, if you please, I would rather not discuss the subject ; it is not interesting." No woman of greater experience could have snubbed him more effectually than did this girl who spoke the truth, and was not feigning indifference as he thought.

"I heard of your marriage ; I trust you are — satisfied." She was going to say happy ; but she was so indignant with him for dragging in the past that she substituted a word more descriptive of his bargaining.

"I am as happy as most people to whom fate is unkind," he said in a hard tone, yet sighing slightly, trying to draw the girl's sympathies. A vain man, he could not imagine she had forgotten him. Besides, she was Miss Maynard still ; that seemed conclusive of fidelity.

"People make their own fate very often, Mr. Ferrers, and I think you are not very just to your wife. I am sorry for her." The last words she uttered in a low contemptuous tone, and looking away past his hard, handsome face, she saw the kind cheery one of her host, and she wondered at her blindness. At that moment, by a kind of attractive sympathy, Roger met her glance, and her smile sent hope coursing with strength through his veins.

Ferrers saw that she was no longer the child he had often considered her, but a woman with very strong ideas of what was right and would stand no tampering with her code of honour.

To Trixie the dinner seemed endless. It was an effort to talk to this man, to keep their conversation on the thin ice of trivialities, for he tried to turn it in a personal channel, which she resented. At last she was freed, and she gave a sigh of relief as she took a low chair in the drawing-room near her mother. She was feeling irritated and upset with the meeting and the conversation, and yet there was a certain satisfaction; for now she thoroughly realized the awful mistake she might have made in being dazzled with mere dross, whilst the true, pure gold was passed by unheeded.

When the men came in Trixie was afraid that Ferrers would make for her corner. She saw him move as if to cross, but his host unconsciously prevented him by going to her himself.

"Well, Trixie, do you know I think you were a little bored at dinner, eh? I was hoping, as your partner was a previous acquaintance, he would have been entertaining," said Roger, looking down at her and thinking how pretty she was, though he fancied she looked paler than usual.

"Oh, no indeed, Mr. Humphreys, it was all right, I assure you. Did I look bored? I am very sorry—that is bad manners, isn't it? But I am not a good talker, and Mr. Ferrers and I have nothing in common," said Trixie, blushing slightly as she looked up and met her friend's earnest eyes bent on her face.

"Why Mr. Humphreys? You used to call me Roger in the old days," he said in a low tone, pretending to take her fan. It was apparently all he had noticed in her halting speech.

"Then I was only a child; I hardly like now," said she shyly, not daring to look up again.

"Now I suppose you are an old woman, eh, Trixie, or I am very forbidding? Which? Anyhow, I prefer Roger, so don't forget. I see they want me. That is the hard work of a host. He may not enjoy himself in his own way for long," he said gently, in a tone which left no doubt as to where he found his pleasure.

Driving home, Trixie was unusually quiet. As a rule the guests and their manners formed a little gossip with which she amused her mother. To-night she was preoccupied.

"Tired, dear? or were your efforts at conversation more than

trying?" said her mother lightly, as they were once more at home.

"No, mother dear, I am not very tired, I was only thinking," she answered; "and thoughts are very mixed company sometimes."

"Was that the Mr. Ferrers you met in town?" said her mother quietly, noting the fact that his presence seemed to have wrought a change in the girl's bright manner.

"Yes, mother, that's Mr. Ferrers," she said, and she hoped her mother would not question her more.

"I thought—I gathered from your letters, you and he were great friends, dear, but you seemed to treat him coldly," said her mother, wanting to know the truth and yet hesitating to intrude with mere curiosity.

"Mother, darling, I ought to have told you. We were friends, and then he——" The girl spoke in a hard voice, but failed to finish her sentence. She could not say in bald language he had grown tired of her.

"Dearest, I can guess. Never mind, Trixie, you need not tell me. A man like that is not worth a moment's thought of sorrow." And gentle Mrs. Maynard spoke firmly, indignant that any man could bring a shadow on her child's face. She looked anxiously at her daughter. "Trixie, you are not thinking of him?"

"Yes, mother, I was, and pitying his poor wife; but now those thoughts will be buried with the past, which I had begun to forget till the memory faced me to-night. But don't worry your little head, mother dear. I am cured. No sentimental regrets linger for one so utterly worthless. Why are men so weak, mother? I used to think they were strong in every sense of the word," said Trixie, smiling slightly, as she put her arm round her mother.

"That was only a child's ideal, Trixie; they are, after all, not more than human beings. But, dear, don't let bitterness take place in your thoughts. Faith and truth are realities, and are to be found unfortunately not always in the most brilliant setting. Still I am glad, dear, that you have told me. I was often afraid there had been some one, and that perhaps a memory might spoil your happiness."

"No, mother dear, no memory will trouble me. It might have done had I not been shown so clearly how utterly false he was. It was hard at the time, but it was a safe remedy for dispelling

a dream. Perhaps the past has helped me." That was all she said, but it satisfied her mother, who felt that Roger's chance was hopeful.

The next afternoon Trixie was in the garden, busily tying up carnations. She was stooping over them and so intent on her work that she was hardly conscious of footsteps behind her, except she thought in a vague way it might be the gardener, and she wanted him.

"Oh, Smith, get me a little more bast," she said, without looking round.

"Certainly, miss," said a voice, decidedly not in the gardener's Devonshire accent.

"How you startled me. I thought it was Smith," said Trixie, turning a rather flushed face to Roger Humphreys.

"Can I help you? I am a capital gardener," and he laughed as he tried to take her hand from the carnation.

"Well, that is not the way. You must excuse me shaking hands at present. If you want to help, hold that while I tie it—or perhaps you would prefer the more exciting task of weeding a little further away," said Trixie saucily, just giving a glance at him, but she dropped her eyes as quickly, not caring to meet the tender look in his.

"No, thank you; weeding is unprofitable. I prefer this; it is more sociable; so tie away," said Roger, holding the flowers carefully while she bound them round. "How pretty carnations are," remarked Roger, not looking at the flowers but at her face, noting how her delicate colour came and went under the shade of her garden hat.

"Yes, they give a great show of colour," said Trixie. "But nothing can compare to roses in my mind."

"No, I suppose they are the queen of flowers. Their beauty is fascinating, but in gathering them one is apt to forget their thorns," said Roger with a comical smile of pain.

'Still their scent and loveliness reward you for all their thorns. No pleasure is quite perfect," said Trixie, finishing the process of tying up.

"What a very philosophical little woman. You mean to say we generally value what is hard to get. I think you are right, Trixie," said Roger quietly, wondering to himself if he dared try again and pluck this rose for himself. He had essayed once, but

only reached the thorns. Now he almost thought the flower was growing nearer within reach.

A silence fell on them. Trixie busied herself in picking up her basket and filling it with the odd bits lying about. Roger stood and looked on in idleness. Then they both walked down the path to the summer-house. The hum of the bees and insects in the warm sunshine was the only sound around them.

"Trixie, my sister wants you to come and have tea with her to-day—will you?" he said, breaking the silence.

"I am afraid I cannot to-day. I will come to-morrow if I may."

"Very well, come any day. She will be glad to see you; she is alone now, so mind you come."

"All right, I will."

"How prettily you and your mother keep this garden; I am so fond of it," said Roger, looking round and then thinking how like one of her own flowers was the girl beside him.

"Mother is so clever and has such taste; she has taught Smith a lot and then she works quite hard herself, Mr. Hum—Roger," said Trixie, shyly dragging out his name.

"How difficult it is for you to say my name now; couldn't you try, Trixie, it is such an easy one—could you? Ah, Trixie, my darling, I want you to call me Roger in the old way, but with a new meaning—can you?" and Roger bent his head, eagerly watching her face.

"I don't know what you mean," said Trixie in a very low tone, hardly knowing what she said. She was leaning against the wood-work of the summer-house and the scent of the honey-suckle stole on them.

"Yes, Trix, you do, dear. Don't you remember I spoke two years ago? Haven't I waited long enough? Have I spoken too soon again? Trix, Trix, don't play with me; tell me you do care a little. Look up, dear," and he gently took her face between his hands, but with a certain masterful touch that somehow gave Trix a happy feeling. She looked shyly at him; her eyes must have revealed what she could not say, for such a look of happiness stole over his face that Trixie dropped her eyes again.

"Trix, darling, do you mean it? and you really care for this old Roger," he said, tenderly putting his arm round her.

"Yes, Roger, I love you, and, oh—Roger, I am so sorry for

two years ago," said Trix almost inaudibly, but it satisfied him, for he bent his head still lower till their lips met.

As they wandered in the garden, glad in their new-found happiness, Trixie told him of her one trouble, and he listening felt that it was well the man was out of reach.

"Darling, you have no regrets?" said Roger, anxiously looking into her pure eyes.

"None, Roger; yes, one for having given you pain," said Trixie sweetly, but he stopped her with a kiss, for all the pain had vanished at her touch. "But it has taught me what perhaps I should never have known, and I might have gone on blindly and missed my true happiness." And Trixie looked up at his strong face, at his grey eyes which could be both tender and hard, and she read the strength of the one in whose hands she was placing her life.

"We will not miss any more happiness, please God," said Roger, grateful in his heart that so much was given him. "I have gathered the rose I wanted, Trix, but I had to strive for it in spite of thorns, and now I shall wear it all my life," said Roger, holding her hand firmly in his. He looked up at the blue sky above. It was not brighter than the sunshine in his heart, for they were together. Hand in hand they went the way of life, meeting flowers and brambles in turn, but love was in their hearts and accompanied them on their journey.

"Two in the gold of the sun as it sets ;
Two close together at death of the day ;
Two in the world that forgives and forgets ;

* * * *

But one in the faith, and one in the prayer.'

Ten Days in Town.

“ Hôtel Métropole.

“ DEAR PHŒBE,

“ Ten days in town fly very quickly when every morning and every afternoon are filled with commissions from country friends. We started out on Monday morning with a list about a yard long, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that we checked off each item as we accomplished it. It was by no means hard work, however, for there is a wonderful pleasure in looking over pretty things. For instance, the two hours we spent at Jay's were agreeable enough. As I told you, we have just had a nice little legacy of £50 apiece. We unanimously agreed that this was too small a sum to be put away in the bank, and we therefore had the delightful pleasure of spending the bulk of it. Can you imagine a more congenial occupation than choosing pretty dresses, nice gloves, and becoming hats and bonnets for one's own wear and that of the good sisters who are at home, anxiously awaiting the result of our purchasing performances ?

“ One of the most interesting departments of Jay's enormous establishment is that which deals with mourning. We heard all about it while we were there. Directly the telegram or message comes, assistants are sent with patterns to any address, whether in town or in any other part of England, Ireland or Scotland. They take with them an assortment of skirts, mantles and millinery, as well as handkerchiefs, fichus, cuffs, collars and every possible article required for mourning wear. The materials include the beautiful 'crêpe imperial,' made exclusively for Jay and registered as his peculiar property. Gloves, umbrellas, veils, and, if required, widows' caps, are all taken on approbation. Every suggestion is made that can spare trouble to those who at the time need to be spared in every way. Everything is made as easy as possible. In addition to woollen materials for every-day wear, a variety of patterns of silk is also sent with the assistant. A beautiful material is 'cashmere royal silk,' another is 'fleur de suède,' and yet another, 'fleur de soie.' These can be made up

in any fashion, and, as you may have observed, mourning is much lighter in character than it used to be some time ago. In fact, it is possible to wear the deepest weeds without sacrificing the grace of figure or elegance of bearing which characterizes some women. One of the advantages of this system is that Jay, from long experience, is in a position to advise upon what we may call the etiquette of mourning, the duration in different cases. Some of us are fortunately exempt from experience in such matters and find it impossible to arrive at any conclusion as to how much, if any, crape need be worn, and for how long a period deep mourning need be provided. All these details are at the fingers' ends of the assistants. So rapidly are these orders executed that it is quite possible to have mourning despatched on the same day that the telegram or order is received. The workers in these departments are so experienced that the dresses and mantles are perfectly finished, short as is the time in which they have to be completed. Sometimes it is not necessary to take measurements, a well-fitting bodice being utilized as a pattern and not only exactly reproduced as far as size is concerned, but translated into the very best cut and style, for which Jay's establishment is so noted. I have known a rather dowdy-looking woman perfectly transformed by the difference in her appearance caused by this. The trimmings are all well up to date, and in the disposal of crape, a most difficult task, the greatest skill is brought to bear. The handling of this material needs special training and has to be manipulated with peculiar skill, which is only to be developed by constant practice. Crape tucks and frills are the despair of the ordinary dressmaker, but with those who have been working at such trimmings for years and years the difficulty disappears.

"We turned into Harrod's Stores, intending to spend about twenty minutes there, but found the variety of departments was so great and the things so fascinating that we passed three whole hours quite pleasantly in wandering through the place. They have opened three large drapery shops, in addition to their furniture, ironmongery, stationery and provision stores. Being in search of nice materials for warm winter dresses, we turned over all the materials on the dress counter. Shot tweeds, we find, are the most fashionable just at present. A lovely one was in blue and bronze, with a sort of bloom on it. Others have curious designs like the watered mark on a bank note. These are called

diagonal tweeds. One in brown, gold and peacock blue was remarkably effective. Shot hopsack is another favourite material. The cheapness of these struck us very much. Can you imagine obtaining in our poky little country shops a double width shot hopsack, at 1s. 11½d. the yard, forty-six inches wide? Naturally we invested largely, and in addition to dress lengths, bought some silk and wool mixtures for trimming. Amazon whipcords are another very fashionable fabric in all sorts of designs. In some the whipcord runs in close single lines, in others they are further apart. The direction is nearly always diagonal. A few of them have a shimmering look, which rather gets on one's brain, but this is only when the colours vividly contrast with each other. Just now self colours are more worn than any other, not only for adults, but children, and it really is a relief after the too hideous contrasts that have vexed our vision during the last few months. Only the other day, while sitting in church, and not wanting to think of any one's clothes, my thoughts were obliged to concentrate themselves on a yellow brown gown that sat in front of me, with bright mauve frills round the hem. More frills of the same sort formed epaulettes over the sleeves, and a little bit that had accidentally turned back revealed the squalid truth that the satin had a cotton back. The evident pride with which this too horrible garment was worn added to my distress of mind, and it was only by shutting my eyes that I could get away from its evil influence. Why not have a sumptuary law for church only, to prevent these agonizing contrasts being admitted?

"You will be glad to hear that many of the very prettiest of the materials sold at Harrod's Stores, checked woollens, for instance, are of Scotch make, so that in purchasing them one can stroke the right way the fibre of one's latent patriotism. No one expects this sentiment to be so strong as to induce us to buy what we do not like. That would be patriotism indeed! But when we can combine economy, beauty and British manufactures, a glow of delightful feeling is the result. A black and red check struck us as being remarkably pretty. There were also flecked tweeds and plain vicuna cloths in dark rich shades.

"The fittings in this shop are different from those we have ever seen anywhere else, the counters being in bright polished mahogany, inlaid with panels of bird's-eye maple. The colour of the boxes in which things are stowed away is a beautiful deep

green, with brass handles to the drawers, and the walls are terra cotta, so that the whole effect is cheerful and yet rich. The evening materials were in lovely colours—most tempting. First, there were pale silk surahs in pink, green, maize, mauve, cream, white and tones of brown and tan. These at 2s. 6d. a yard would make inexpensive dresses. Then there were varieties of nun's cloth, double width, at a fraction more than a shilling a yard, and in this soft woollen material the pale tints looked even prettier than in the silk. I noticed a lovely turquoise blue and a very soft tone of eau de Nil. There was also a pale water green which would look lovely made up with pink velvet sleeves and a garniture of pink poppies. Cannot you see yourself in a gown like that, whirling round to the strains of the last new waltz? There is plenty of choice, for in addition to these materials there were crêpons of all colours. A yellow one gave me an idea for an evening dress with orange satin sleeves and black jet trimmings.

“We invested largely in Harrod's gloves, which are of excellent cut, giving that freedom to the thumb which many makes of gloves deny. Don't you love having plenty of gloves? Our little legacy enabled us to provide ourselves each with three dozen pairs for morning and one dozen pairs for evening. The colours are very pretty this season, including soft mushroom tones, tan, chocolate brown and tender grey. For evening the natural suède and black summed up all our requirements. With these two one can hardly go wrong, no matter what one's dress may be. We saw some perfectly lovely beaded net trimmings for evening dress, one with gold on white, another with white and gold on black, and a third in green and pink and gold. Silk blouses for evening wear are admirably useful. They can be had high with long sleeves, half high with elbow sleeves, or quite low with short puffed sleeves. A perfectly sweet one was in shot pink and green, the sleeves composed of three frills each. The trimming of these evening bodices is usually formed of lace turned back from the low bodice and falling in a deep frill over the dress and over the top of the sleeves. We noticed some pretty tea jackets in various colours, trimmed with lace. Some had Watteau pleats. Eva invested in one made of pink surah, and trimmed with deep cream-coloured Maltese lace. A black surah had a tucked yoke and was trimmed with imitation Venetian point. There were some very warm blouses for day wear. One of these was in car-

dinal bengaline, trimmed with a handsome passementerie of gold, jet and cardinal.

"The newest underskirts are in striped moiré silk, the stripes being in blue, pink, red, green, or some other colour. These are lined with flannel as far as the knee, where a deep flounce, cut on the bias, is added and lined with silk or Italian cloth. Striped moreen is another material for these. The fur department was most tempting. We saw several customers trying on things and we simply wanted all they were trying on. There was a lovely little collarette of chinchilla, made very full and reaching to the shoulders, with a stand-up collar which came pretty high in the neck. A very full cape of Persian lamb had apparently been cut out in a complete circle, so that at the neck it was comparatively free from fulness, but round the edge the width was probably about five yards. A similar cape was in unplucked beaver. Chinchilla is very scarce this year. Ermine is used to trim evening capes of green, blue or violet velvet. We noticed a beautiful Victorian pelerine made of beaver in its greyest tone. These pelerines are perfectly flat, in distinction to the round boas. Whole sables and whole ermines are used for the fashionable boa of the moment. A novelty was a longish one made of marten, two skins, two heads and two tails forming the boa. Double fur capes were to us rather new.

"Quite close is the millinery department. A very pretty hat, curving upward on either side, is called, we were told, 'the gardener's daughter.' A large black velvet picture hat was trimmed with lovely long plumes of ostrich feathers. A white felt hat was trimmed with black velvet and black feathers. Steel and jet were mingled in the bonnet trimmings. The flowers were very realistic.

"You will never guess where we went when we had finished with the millinery. Father had commissioned us to secure price lists of wine whenever we found it feasible to do so. We asked for one at Harrod's and were immediately invited to go down and look at the wine cellars. We had never been in a large one before, and the sight of the enormous bins, six bottles deep, the huge vats containing brandy, claret, port, sherry, and, I fancy, whiskey as well, was quite a revelation to us. We brought away the price list with us and posted it to the pater, with the result that he sent an order immediately for some Jameson's Irish

whiskey, vintage '74. It may be wrong to use the word vintage with respect to whiskey, but you are probably no wiser in these matters than I am. He also ordered some Cockburn's port, eight years in bottle and only two guineas a dozen.

"Do you remember the 'Cravenette' waterproof that I sent you when I was in town last, and how much you liked it? I see that it secured a first award at the Chicago World's Fair, and Priestley had two or three for his dress fabrics at the same exhibition. I believe that it was one of Priestley's black silk and wool mixtures that we got from Jay last year, and liked so much. I am sending you a box of specialties from Mrs. Fairbanks, 2A, Hanover Street. The Wood Violet Lustrine is said to impart brilliancy to the hair. It smells very nice, and a few drops sprinkled on the brush serve to cleanse the hair. The 'Crème Splendide' you must apply if your face or hands get rough from exposure to the wind. It is claimed for it that it immediately removes all roughness and ensures a beautiful complexion. The 'Oriental Dentifrice' is by the same maker, who is very well known as a specialist in toilet requisites. The Cremoline soap is intended for softening and whitening the skin. Though strongly scented, it leaves behind it after use only a delicate and agreeable fragrance. It makes a very fine lather and is very pleasant to use. I expect to see you looking quite beautiful when I return, after using all these preparations.

"Another little packet that I am sending you contains Harvest's Lentil Food, which has been devised more especially for infants and invalids. It is certainly inexpensive, and is said to contain every essential for nourishing and supporting the human frame. It can be converted into soup, porridge, custards, puddings and biscuits. Harvest's Flour of Green Peas is one of those things that ought to have been invented long ago, for use during the numerous months when green peas are unobtainable, except in tins or preserved in bottles. This also is specially adapted for the use of children, as well as of adults whose digestion is weak. You must use two tablespoonfuls for each pint of soup. With Liebig's extract of meat it is uncommonly good. Mr. Harvest has covered his tins of green pea flour with the colour of the vegetable itself, so that one cannot readily make a mistake between the two preparations. If you want any more, you must address the maker at Dowgate Dock, Upper Thames Street, E.C. I fancy that your

invalid will approve of these, for they are prescribed by some physicians, and vegetarians commend them.

“For your younger brother’s edification, I send you a catalogue of Melhuish and Sons, with illustrations and prices of all their tools and machines for wood carvers, cabinet-makers, carriage builders wheelwrights, machinists and jewellers. I see also some sets of mathematical instruments, and an attractive series of sable hair pencils. The turning tools will delight him, and the only disadvantage of so full a catalogue is that he will want to buy far more tools than his finances will permit. A number of pages are devoted to describing the tools, and instructions as to their use. Plane irons of all sizes, from the Sheffield make at sevenpence to the elaborate wrought iron jointer plane at thirty-three shillings, are also specified, and I know the volume will be full of charms for the boys.

“Truefitt’s window was one of the prettiest in Bond Street during Christmas and New Year weeks. It was filled with toilet requisites, such as hand glasses, puff boxes, &c., covered with white satin painted with flowers, such as violets, apple blossom, sachets for gloves and handkerchiefs and little pin-cushions, all arranged to match with cut-glass bottles, tied up with satin ribbons which matched the flowers. We went there the other day to have our hair shampooed and dressed in the latest style. The rooms are very comfortable and the young women extremely clever. They make so much of one’s natural growth that additions are usually unnecessary. It is quite luxurious to have the hair dried after washing with the hot-air machine. The worst of it is that the warmth and comfort render one extremely sleepy. I could hardly keep my eyes open during this part of the operation. Have you ever seen any one who had tried face massage? This and manicure are both carried on at Truefitt’s, and we are certainly going to experiment one day and will let you know the result. Everybody says that the beauty of at least two of England’s loveliest women lies in the skilled practice of massage.

“As you say that tea causes you to experience a disagreeable sensation of palpitation, I conclude that you must have been using some blend in which the objectionable element of tannin is very strongly represented. Consequently, I am sending you a canister from the Russian China Tea Company, formed to

supply pure Chinese plantation teas in the United Kingdom, as imported into Russia. The offices are at 17, Philpot Lane, E.C. The *Lancet* quotes the report of the Analytical Commission appointed to inquire into the merits of various kinds of tea, in which it is stated that those of the above Company yielded only 5 per cent. of tannin after three hours' boiling in distilled water, and yet were richer in the stimulating property technically termed Theine. So you will be pretty safe in enjoying your favourite beverage in these circumstances. The delicious Rose Blend at 3s. 6d. the pound is suitable for drinking in Russian fashion—with slices of lemon. This mode is now getting quite fashionable, and a *samovar* is by no means an unaccustomed sight at a modish tea-table.

"I wonder if you read in the *English Illustrated* about a year ago an article called 'An Historic Pharmacy,' descriptive of the origin (early in the last century) of the firm of Allen and Hanbury, Plough Court? I read the article, and the illustrations made me wish to see the place; so, as we wanted a supply of castor oil (mother believes in as preventive of influenza), we took a hansom and soon found ourselves in the vicinity of the famous Lombard Street, and came away with a good supply of their practically tasteless oil.

"I wish we had some nice place in our little country town where we could get a delicious lunch, as we can in London. It is so tiring to go in for a day's shopping and have nowhere to go but to a pastrycook's or a hotel. We lunched this morning at Callard's new premises at 65, Regent Street, most conveniently situated for refreshments after a *matinée* or afternoon concert. The *cuisine* is so good that the 'light luncheon' too often develops into a solid square meal.

"Oh! how cheap are boots and shoes! It is quite extraordinary. Good ones, however, are much the same price as usual. I was determined to have plenty of variety, so I selected my own at Kelsey's, in Oxford Street—patent boots and shoes and such coquettishly dainty evening shoes—and yours at Parker's, in the same street. I am sure you will like their Russia leather boots, and the white brocade shoes to wear with your evening dress on the 30th. After I had chosen as many as I thought we could possibly want, I happened to pass Godfrey Hall and Co.'s, in Regent Street, and was so attracted by some

very pretty boots and shoes that I went in and invested in a few more pairs. I do like nice foot-gear—do not you?

“So much for business. We have been doing a round of the theatres—laughing heartily over ‘Gudgeons;’ crying as heartily at ‘Sowing the Wind,’ in which Miss Winifred Emery is so pathetically powerful; and more delighted than I can tell you with ‘The Pied Piper of Hamelin,’ at the Comedy. The artistic beauty of this charming play is a pleasant contrast with the vulgarity of the ordinary pantomime, of late years only a combination of limb-revealing costumes, music-hall ditties, coarse jokes and hideous puns. The scenery and the dresses in ‘The Piper’ form a strikingly lovely series of stage pictures, and the music is very pretty and now and then absolutely touching. The piper himself is so handsome and so picturesque that one can understand the charm he exercises over the children. The only fault of the play is—now, do not laugh!—that there are not enough rats!

“Your affectionate

“C. E. H.”

“P.S.—I have just had a cup of delicious cocoa. It is Gastin’s Colonial Cocoa, manufactured far away in British Guiana, fresh on the spot where the cocoa beans grow. The aroma and flavour are delicious.”

A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER V.

SYLVIA IS RASH!

"MOTHER!"

"What is it, Sylvia? How tiresome you are; not dressed yet, and Mr. Christopher's carriage waiting for us."

Mrs. Gould spoke with not an unreasonable amount of impatience. Mr. Christopher had become more speechless and stolid than usual since learning of the way in which the ring had been lost—or rather "mis-laid;" for Sylvia protested that "it couldn't be 'lost'—it must be either in the bath still, or have slipped down the waste pipe."

"As I am going on the river with him to-day, may I be let off Mr. Christopher to-morrow?" Sylvia pleaded humbly. "I wasn't told when I got engaged that I had to see him every day until we are married. May I have to-morrow 'off' to show Belle about?"

"Yes, yes; only make haste and come down now. You have had the same time that Lily has had, and she has gone down looking as if a maid had been dressing her while a Bond Street milliner superintended the work."

"Squeak wasn't quite dry, and as Ann has gone out, I had to finish him," Sylvia explained hurriedly.

"Those horrible dogs! it's really wicked the way in which you waste time on them. Ann gone out, you say? Where has she gone? I will not have my servants running in and out of my house just as they please without asking my permission. The fact is, Ann overrates the value of her services altogether."

"Say all that to her, not to me, mother," Sylvia interrupted pettishly, as she came out dressed—or nearly so—at last from her room. She carried her gloves in her hand, and had left her veil flowing loosely about her hat, in anticipation of some one

kindly volunteering to tie and fasten it securely for her when she went down. Lily never trusted to these contingencies. Her gloves were always on and buttoned, her veil always severely fixed, before she left her toilet table.

"Found the ring?" was Mr. Christopher's salutation to his betrothed when she came down.

"No; they had let all the water out of the bath before I went up after luncheon. But Ann did it, so if the ring had been there she would have found it."

"I hope you will take more care of the next one I give you," Mr. Christopher said stiffly, and Sylvia heard herself replying almost against her will:

"The next will be the wedding ring, I suppose; they generally fit far too tightly to fall off—at least, so I've heard."

"You have a nice opportunity now of giving Sylvia a prettier engagement ring than the one she has lost; it was not quite a good shape, was it?—more a diamond shape than a real marquise," Lily said encouragingly to Mr. Christopher, as she settled herself between her mother and Belle in the roomy carriage. "Don't screw yourself up so, Miss Warrener; you're not crushing me a bit; my things never crumple."

"I wish I could say the same of mine," Sylvia said testily, tugging at a portion of her draperies, upon which Mr. Christopher had seated himself solidly as she spoke. "Oh, dear! I'd much rather be on the top of that omnibus than stuffed up in a close carriage on a hot day like this."

"You have never been on the top of an omnibus in your life; you don't know what you are talking about," Mrs. Gould said warningly; but Sylvia would not take the warning. The sight of Mr. Christopher's under lip protruding in pompous displeasure made her reckless.

"Don't I know what the top of an omnibus is like! I've been on them often enough with Dick Ogilvie," she said defiantly.

"And who may Dick Ogilvie be?" Mr. Christopher asked, in an unblushing, heavily domineering manner that made Belle hate him and sympathize with Sylvia and the unknown Dick at once.

"The son of a humble acquaintance of ours, to whom we try to be kind," Mrs. Gould answered glibly; for Sylvia, her brief burst of defiance over, sat sad and silent, feeling that she had done herself no good, but on the contrary had probably curtailed

her own liberty of action in the future, by her injudiciously familiar mention of a man whom in all probability she would never see again.

"I dislike humble acquaintances; they're neither fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring. I'll have none of them about my house, remember, Sylvia."

Mr. Christopher spoke authoritatively, "overbearingly," Belle thought; and apparently Sylvia thought so too, for she turned the back of her head to him without making any reply, while Mrs. Gould tried to flatter him back into good humour by saying:

"You are just like Sylvia's dear father in that respect, Mr. Christopher; he always said it was quite necessary for him to edit my visiting list very carefully, as I was so stupidly amiable to women that I should have fallen a prey to any number of needy sycophants if he had not taken care of me."

"But the person who took Sylvia about on the top of omnibuses was not a woman," Mr. Christopher grumbled.

"Nor was he a needy sycophant, you know that very well, mamma. At any rate, he was much more liberal to me than I was to him." Sylvia involuntarily drew herself an inch further away from Mr. Christopher as she spoke, and he expressed his resentment of the action by saying sneeringly:

"He used to pay 'a penny all the way' for you, I suppose, when you took those creditable 'bus jaunts together."

"He did more than that. He gave me two pedigreed white bull-terriers that must have cost him a small fortune," Sylvia flashed out, and Mr. Christopher swore a mental oath that those white bull-terriers should never pollute his threshold by crossing it.

The note of discord having been struck at starting, it is needless to say, the time on the river dragged fearfully, and no one had much appetite for the dainty dinner to which they sat down wearily at eight o'clock. On such occasions one woman may get on pleasantly enough with four men. But it is not on record that one man has ever got on pleasantly with four women in a boat on the river. And at a dinner table at a riverside inn afterwards they either all of them want him to attend to them and amuse them, in which case they remember and see the worst and most ridiculous things that can be remembered, and see the most

unattractive things that can be seen about each other. Or—as in the case in point—they none of them want him, and when they get thoroughly nerve-weary from dulness, they let him perceive the unflattering truth, and he dislikes it.

It is true that Mrs. Gould did her best to make Mr. Christopher believe that he was regarded as a benefactor to the whole family, and a very precious object in their eyes. She struggled, as only a mother who still has a slippery daughter on her hands can struggle, when she sees the manly hand, which has been stretched out to relieve her of her burden, held hesitatingly. It was clear to Mrs. Gould that this heavy, stolid walrus-like man had a suspicious, jealous disposition, and that Sylvia would have to "look to her shining" when she became his wife. It was also clear to her that Sylvia's unguarded mention of Dick Ogilvie and the bull-terriers had aroused a good deal that was jealous and suspicious in Mr. Christopher's nature. Nevertheless, Mrs. Gould's paramount aim and earnest prayer was that nothing should occur to break off the match. For she was poor, and she hated poverty, both for her children and herself, though she always professed to be superior to the advantages of worldly wealth for herself. It "was only on account of Lily and Sylvia," she told every one to whom she spoke about it "that she kept up a prettily-ordered establishment in a nice neighbourhood. Life in any out-of-the-way retreat would be good enough for her if it were not for her dear daughters." In the meantime, while her dear daughters were marketable articles, it was clearly her duty to display them to every possible advantage, and to keep every possible customer who could give a good price in as well-satisfied a mood as she could.

She got no help from any one but Lily this day. Sylvia was ruffled still, partly because her mother had seemed to include Dick Ogilvie in the class of "needy sycophants" to whom she had alluded, and partly because she felt that she herself had been an undiplomatic fool in dragging Dick Ogilvie's name to the fore when she had no object to gain in doing it. If she had only been quiet Dick, in the course of time, might have been introduced to her future home and husband, and at least she would have had the dubious comfort of hearing of all the ups and downs of his infelicitous fortunes. But by her injudicious boastings about the Bohemian 'bus rides and the bull-terriers, she had with her own hand barred the way to a renewal of her acquaintance with him. She

looked at Mr. Christopher as she thought this, and groaned in her soul at the lack of compensation there was for the loss of Dick in the person of the clumsy, slow-speeched man whose laborious efforts to give her pleasure fatigued her to witness.

Belle Warrener had her own private reasons for being unhelpful in the heavy work of amusing Mr. Christopher. She could not forget that a whole fortnight had passed since Arthur Stanmer had come to the Rectory of his own free will and half led her to think that he liked her as well as ever. She could not forget that since that night he had made no sign of being conscious of her existence, much less of taking any pleasurable interest in it. Nor could she forget the look of the girl who had got out at the Prior Common station that morning. Though she had not seen this girl drive off in the Dene Prior carriage, she intuitively associated her (the strange girl) with Arthur's mother. "It would be like Mrs. Stanmer to persuade mother to send me out of the way if she was going to have a fashionable girl like that staying with her. She wouldn't like that girl to see that Arthur was even friendly with me! She needn't be afraid; he isn't even friendly with me now! And I!—Oh, I only wish I had never been idiot to care what he thought of me. If I hadn't been so nervous about *his* opinion I should have out with the whole truth about Dick, the handsome tramp, and every one would have known that I have nothing to be ashamed of. But now, for Arthur's sake, for fear of hurting his pride or vanity, I've made a secret which Mr. Stanmer will never reward me for keeping. Funny that Sylvia should have a 'Dick' in her way too, but *her* Dick must be a gentleman, and if he is she ought to throw off this yoke and go to him, for she loves the *bull-terriers* even better than she does the man she is going to marry."

Being occupied with these reflections about her own affairs, Belle naturally was not much of an aid to Mrs. Gould in the task of entertaining Mr. Christopher. But Lily, without effort and without intention, helped. Lily was so unfeignedly well pleased with her blue cambric, and her own appearance in it, that she set Mr. Christopher firmly on his most stolidly self-satisfied legs again. She admired the water and the water-lilies, and the banks of the river, and the dinner and wines and flowers with such pointed appreciation that Mr. Christopher felt as if he had manufactured everything from the scenery to the salad himself,

and thought what a soundly, practically clever fellow he must be to have done it so well. He also resolved that when he was married, Lily should find a happy home in his house whenever she liked to come there. She would open Sylvia's eyes to her own enormous good fortune in having caught him! And having her with them would be a good excuse for keeping their mother out of the house, for, of course, he "could not be expected to keep the whole family."

This was how the future son-in-law, to whom she was paying most fatiguing homage, worded his sentiments regarding those to whom he was going to ally himself in a lumberingly condescending way that already made Sylvia's active young hands tingle to box his large flappy ears.

It was late that night when they reached home, and Sylvia breathed a silent fervent prayer of thanksgiving when she found they were to be permitted to separate and go to their respective rooms at once, and that the "talking to" she would have to endure about that lost ring was to be deferred till the morning. The loss of the ring did not weigh very heavily upon her mind. If Mr. Christopher was good for nothing else, he was good for a boundless lot of jewellery, for had he not promised that she should have it? But what did weigh on her mind was this: The ring must have fallen into the bath while she was washing Bubble. Ann had bathed Squeak immediately after, and cleaned the bath out. The ring could be replaced. Her confidence in Ann's absolute integrity and honesty would be shaken. And this was the worst part of it, for Ann had been recommended to her mother's service by the humble acquaintance with whom Sylvia had boarded for a time, Mrs. Ogilvie.

Late that night, when all the rest of the household were steeped in their first sound sleep, Sylvia crept out of her room and made her way to the one occupied by Ann only on account of her being elderly and confidential. The woman woke with a start and a muffled exclamation of terror when Sylvia softly touched her on the arm and whispered:

"Did you go there to-day, Ann? Did you hear anything of Mr. Dick?"

"La, Miss Sylvia, you put me all of a tremble; no, I didn't go near the Ogilvies' street. I'm not going to be a go-between. Your mamma trusts me, Miss Sylvia, and you're going to be

married. Why should you want to hear anything more about Mr. Dick?"

"I only want to hear that he is well and happy, and better off than he was. It can't do me any harm to hear that, and it can't hurt you to tell me."

"Go to bed now, Miss Sylvia; I'm all of a shake for fear any one should hear you. I'll tell you all I know in the morning."

"Is he well? and where is he?" Sylvia demanded.

"He's well enough; he's one of the sort who are always well when they get everything they want, no matter who goes without," Ann said contemptuously.

"Where is he? and what is he doing? I'll go directly you tell me that," Sylvia persisted.

"Where he is I don't know; he writes word to his mother that he's travelling for a wine merchant's house, and that he has a smart horse and dog-cart for his own. But he was always a liar, so perhaps that's not true," Ann said viciously.

"Oh, Ann, *you* to be turning against him, and he always was so *kind* to you," Sylvia said reproachfully as she crept softly out of the room, while Ann lay shivering and muttering to herself:

"Kind to me, indeed! and what have I been to *him*, the scamp! old fool that I am. And Miss Sylvia's another! She's so rash that I don't wonder that her ma' wants to get her safely married."

CHAPTER VI.

DICK OGILVIE.

IN one of the many small streets that branch off from Oxford Street on the left-hand side as one goes from the Circus towards Holborn, the specially neat—not to say smart—frontage of a small private house, generally arrested the attention of the least observant passer-by.

The upper part of the old oak door was filled in with cathedral glass. The brass lion's head knocker of a genuine antique pattern was polished to such a pitch of brilliancy that it acted as a mirror to the visitors who ascended the well-whitened steps of that little house. The windows sparkled with cleanliness, and the blinds and curtains that draped and shaded them were of the softest and filmiest white muslin, edged with lace.

There were flower-boxes up to the fourth storey window filled with hanging masses of musk and trails of ivy-leaved geranium. Just below the cathedral glass on the first solid oak bar of the door a neat brass plate, engraved with the words,

MRS. OGILVIE,

Boarding House,

further engaged the attention of many a passer-by, and led to many of the latter going in and interviewing Mrs. Ogilvie. On this day, the day after Mr. Christopher's unsuccessful attempt to give Sylvia and her family a pleasant water-trip and river-side dinner, Mrs. Ogilvie, the mistress of the house, was resting, half-dozing over a newspaper in an arm-chair of the fine old order, in which rest could be really obtained, by the open window in her bedroom.

Luncheon was over, and she would not be called upon to superintend actively any more household matters until the time for the seven o'clock dinner approached. So she had time to sit down and think. As usual, whenever this was the case, she was thinking of her son.

The room and everything in it—indeed the whole house—breathed sweetly of cleanliness, carried to such a pitch that it would have been luxury to live there even on a diet of bread and water. Cleanliness had always come far before godliness with Mrs. Ogilvie. Whatever stain or soil there might ever have been on her character, there had never been one, she proudly asserted (and with truth), on her hands.

She was a woman of sixty, or more. Tall, erect, white-haired, pale-skinned, aquiline-featured, crisp and trim as a young bride in her well-made plain black serge dress with linen collar and cuffs, that carried a polish which no one had ever seen dimmed. She wore no cap on her silvery-white hair, which was becomingly arrayed in light curls over her forehead, and a fine substantial coil behind. There was much quiet power in her face, and in the large well-shaped hands, which were as beautifully kept as if a manicure had resided on the premises.

Yet withal this refined fastidiousness of person, of apparel and in household matters, it was evident to any but the most superficial observer that Mrs. Ogilvie was not a lady. She spoke well and carefully—too carefully in fact. She never said "don't" or

"can't." She never said "couldn't" or "wouldn't." If by any unhappy chance she let slip an "h" in speaking more rapidly than usual, she would laboriously work round a sentence in order to bring in that injured word again and give the aspirate its full value. She was never guilty of any solecism at table. The several subtle uses of knife, fork and spoon were well known to her. But in spite of her acquired composure she was always a little anxious when the crucial test feat of feeding was going on. She had an eagle eye for the slightest dereliction from table duty on the part of either domestic or guest. And this fact, taken in conjunction with her speechlessness at meals, made the more malicious-minded surmise that she had been a parlour-maid. However, as she never either heard or answered any questions concerning herself, these surmises always melted into thin air for want of something to rest upon.

This afternoon it was very sultry and the atmosphere, even in her well-ventilated room was rather heavy. She struggled for a time against drowsiness and endeavoured to read up the latest news, in order that she might at least look intelligent when current topics were discussed at dinner. Her "guest list" was a short one just at present, it only numbered three maiden ladies from Penzance, who thought they were having a rollicking time because they were within "easy walking distance of Oxford Circus and Regent Street." Mrs. Ogilvie found them very remunerative boarders, for they invariably went for a walk immediately after breakfast, lost their way, and found themselves compelled to lunch at the first confectioner's they could find, in order that they might be directed into the right path to their temporary abode. The morning's misadventure generally took away their appetite for dinner, so Mrs. Ogilvie scored by their lack of the bump of locality, and bore with their mild complaints of the "many streets and turnings there were that looked so much alike," with tolerant graciousness.

These three ladies had not come back to luncheon this day, and Mrs. Ogilvie was half-dreamily considering how the lunch, with the addition of a Chelsea jelly and a cheese *soufflé*, could be turned into a dinner, when she was wakened sharply by the opening of her door and the appearance of a man.

She was wide-awake in a moment—wide-awake and welcoming him.

"My dear boy! My own Dick! You have found time to come up to me tho' you said you couldn't get leave for a fortnight."

She had risen as she spoke and put her arms round the neck of a man quite as handsome and a little taller than herself. A well-dressed, careless, good-looking fellow, who apparently had not a care on his mind, excepting that his boots were dusty.

"The guvnor's very good—I told him you were ill—the 'only son of his mother and she a widow'—business, you know—so he has let me off duty to-day; and here I am! Got any news for me? Got any cash for me?"

"No news and not a farthing," she said with decision. "You have your fixed salary now; why do you come to me for more? What new extravagances are you plunging into, Dick?"

"You forget that I was in rags and tatters before I became the lucky recipient of a 'fixed salary,' which, after all, doesn't amount to much," he added grumblingly. "My boots were broken, my hats were battered! Do you remember what I looked like when I came here a year ago?"

She shuddered, then put her hands out to him pityingly, forgivingly, lovingly! She was his mother!

"Do not remind me of that time, Dick. That *my* boy, Arthur Ogilvie's son, should have been reduced to such poverty and privation is terrible."

"That I'm 'your boy' has stood me in good stead all the years of my blasted life, but what the devil's the use of my being 'Arthur Ogilvie's son?' The earth seems to have opened and swallowed him up——"

"—— Hush, Dick! hush! the earth may open again, and then perhaps you will thank me for never having let you forget that you *are* Arthur Ogilvie's son, born in wedlock! the rightful heir to whatever Arthur Ogilvie may have had to leave."

"Dear old mother!" he said, compassionately, and there was such a ring of tenderness in his tone that she felt more warmly towards all the world at once.

"Tell me about your employment, Dick. It won't lead you into drinking habits, I trust? I would have been glad if you could have travelled for any other firm than a wine merchant's."

"My dear mother, I don't carry samples about and drink them on the road," he exclaimed laughingly. "I simply get orders by my ingratiatory address and book them. You were always

afraid the stage would prove a snare to me ; you ought to be pleased now that I have cut the stage and taken to the road."

"Do not speak of the stage, Dick," she said, with a little gesture of horror and disgust. "I shall never forget what I suffered when I saw you play that painful character so well."

"What, 'the Tramp' ? Yes, I made rather a hit in that," he said, laughing. "I've played it in private since," he went on more gravely.

"Tell me about your lodgings and your landlady. I must come and see you, my boy, when you can spare time to have me."

"My landlady is an awful old hag, but she is clean and cooks well. Couldn't you come to tea with me one afternoon next week and bring Miss Gould with you ?"

"Miss Gould is going to be married," she said shortly.

"The deuce she is. Who to ?"

"An elderly gentleman of the name of Christopher. Very rich Ann says he is."

Dick Ogilvie frowned for a moment or two, then thought better of it and smiled.

"Elderly is he ? That doesn't sound as if he were Sylvia's free choice. Poor little girl ! I wish I could afford her."

"For her sake I am glad you cannot afford her, Dick," his mother said, sombrely.

"No ! really ! why ?"

"Because she would love you better than all the world, and you would love yourself even more. Yes, my son, I cannot help seeing that you are selfish, so if you marry I hope the woman you choose will be able to take care of herself."

He laughed lightly.

"Apparently you didn't practise what you preach in the days of your youth, mother."

A faint colour came into her cold pale face.

"At any rate I always took care of you, Dick ; I tried my very best to make you a better man——"

"—— Than I am," he interrupted, with some feeling. "You did, mother, and if there is any good in me I owe it to you. When did you see Ann ?"

"She called here yesterday. The family and a visitor had gone on the river with Mr. Christopher."

"The 'visitor' is some fellow they're trying to collar for Lily, I suppose. Did Ann leave any message for me?"

"She had a letter for you which I could not persuade her to leave with me. I only *hope* it was not from Miss Sylvia. I should despise Ann and never hold out a helping hand to her again, tho' she is my cousin, if she is helping Miss Sylvia to deceive her mother."

"Don't you fret; Ann's on the square about Sylvia, but she and I have a little business matter on together that it is necessary I should see about sometimes."

"You and Ann are not being deluded into investing your money in any of those touting stock-broking concerns, I trust, Dick? I think these guaranteed syndicates is only another name for guaranteed swindling."

"It's something of that kind, but don't be alarmed, mother; we're quite safe. Ann is as cautious an old party as you'll meet if you go from West Kensington to St. Paul's Churchyard, and that's about equal to going from Central Africa to the North Pole."

His mother did not admire his flippant tone, but she admired her son immensely. "A better-dressed, better-looking man you will not see anywhere than Arthur Ogilvie's son," she thought proudly, and as she was thinking it the cleverly-trained domestic, who did scullery work in the morning and turned out in a neat black dress and spotless book muslin apron and cap as parlour-maid in the afternoon, came in and announced that "Miss Sylvia Gould and another young lady were in the drawing-room."

"This is clearly providential and I can assure you there is no collusion," he said laughingly, in reply to the horror-stricken look in his mother's face. "You'll let me come down and see her for a minute or two, mother? Just to ask how Bubble and Squeak are," he asked coaxingly.

"No, Dick, distinctly and decidedly *no!* Mrs. Gould shall never have it in her power to say that I trifled with the trust she reposed in me when I allowed her daughter to meet my son."

"You might as well let me go and congratulate her on her approaching marriage." And the affected sincerity and humility of his appeal grieved his mother, who had a settled aversion to his histrionic abilities. The one part she had seen him play on the stage (she had seen him act many off it) was that of a

vicious blackmailing tramp, and to her intense grief the dramatic critics had been unanimous in declaring that it "fitted him like his skin." Now that he had soared to the respectable height of being "travelling agent" for an unimpeachable firm, the slightest relapse into what she termed his "play-acting" habits was hateful to her.

"You shall not meet Miss Sylvia in my house, Dick," she said sternly. "You do not mean any harm, I believe, but the young lady is engaged to be married, and she does not want to see you or any other man than the gentleman she is engaged to. I shall not keep the young ladies long. Stay here till I come back, my son."

"Certainly I will," he promised cheerfully. Dick Ogilvie when he was fairly prosperous always promised cheerfully to do whatever was asked of him, and as invariably broke his promises.

Mrs. Ogilvie found her two young visitors turning over the big photographic album which, together with bound volumes of *Cassell's Family Magazine* and two or three fragile work baskets belonging to the young lady boarders, decorated the slippery centre-table. As she came into the room Sylvia Gould was pointing out a cabinet picture to the other girl with the words—"This is Dick Ogilvie! isn't he a dream?" Then, without staying to observe the effect produced on Belle Warrener, Sylvia went to meet her old friend.

It seemed to Belle that every drop of blood in her veins flew to her head as she looked at the handsome nonchalant face and well-dressed figure of the man who faced her so bravely in the photograph, the man who in spite of his nonchalant air and fine clothes was undoubtedly "Dick the tramp," whom she had last seen under such humiliating circumstances.

So at least she allowed herself to believe for an instant, the next she cast it from her, and regained her breath sufficiently to respond to Mrs. Ogilvie's measured advances. But Belle could not respond very graciously, for all the time she was thinking, "How much she is like the man who kissed me in the cattle shed! I wish I had never heard of these Ogilvies!"

"We have come to afternoon tea if you will have us, Mrs. Ogilvie," Sylvia was saying. "This is my friend Miss Warrener, who is staying with us. She's a kind of cousin and I want her to see what was my home when mamma sent me over from

Brussels. Have you any news of your son? Ann said something about his having got an appointment that he rather liked?"

There was such obvious interest and anxiety, which was far removed from curiosity, in this inquiry that Mrs. Ogilvie had not the heart to be curt, as her reason and conscience told her she ought to be. She could not refrain from expatiating with maternal pride on the excellence of the post and the salary appended. "And he drives about the country quite like a gentleman" (Sylvia blushed scarlet at this innocently depreciatory remark) "in a very good dog-cart and quite a beautiful horse. You know how fond he is of all animals, especially horses, Miss Sylvia. Please God I may live to see him with some of his own."

"And will you tell him from me that everybody who sees them admires Bubble and Squeak; even mother, who always vowed she'd never have a dog in a London house, hasn't the heart to be anything but kind to Bubble and Squeak——"

"Those magic names have called me in," said a buoyant voice as the door opened and into their midst came a handsome smart fellow, whom Sylvia knew extatically as "Dick Ogilvie," and Belle feared in terror that she had known as "Dick the tramp."

CHAPTER VII.

SYLVIA'S SILLINESS.

FOR a moment—for a less flash of time than a moment—Dick Ogilvie was staggered. The next instant his stage training stood him in good stead, and he was talking to Sylvia Gould about the white bull-terriers and himself as composedly as if his mother was not bitterly hurt and mortified at his headstrong audacity in obtruding himself into Sylvia's presence, and as if Belle Warrener did not exist.

Fortunately for the latter, Mrs. Ogilvie, as mistress of the house and mother of that son, was so absorbed in the consideration of her duties in both these capacities, that she had no attention to bestow upon the strange young lady's discomfiture. Mrs. Ogilvie's one idea was to get in tea and separate Miss Sylvia from Dick, who was making the most of the opportunity which had arisen so unexpectedly of bringing "poor little Sylvia" back to her hearty allegiance to him.

It was in vain that his mother, with her limited social experience, tried to make the conversation general. Dick circumvented her as easily as if she had been three years old instead of threescore. He planted himself on a low chair at the end of the sofa on which Sylvia was sitting, and proceeded to torture the poor little creature to the best of his vain, selfish ability, and the latter was great. As for Belle Warrener, she surely must have been mistaken in thinking she had ever seen this man before. He was so utterly and genuinely indifferent to her presence now. And yet, the turn of his head, the tone of his voice directly he spoke seriously—and he seemed to be speaking very seriously to Sylvia now—kept on recalling vividly that ghastly experience she had been given of man's unscrupulousness and selfishness down in the cattle shed in the meadow at Prior Common.

"So you are going to be married, I hear," he was saying softly to still foolishly-infatuated Sylvia, who was deceiving herself afresh with the idea that Dick *really* cared. "And when you're married I suppose you will send Bubble and Squeak adrift, or to the devil, where you are ready to send me?"

"Oh, Dick, don't, don't say that. We have always been such friends, and I—love the dogs and shall always keep them. They're real chums to me; I can never part with them."

"There was a time when you said I was a 'real chum' to you, but you've made up your mind to part with me, haven't you? Mr. Christopher is an awful swell, I'm told—smart, up-to-date fellow, who will never allow his wife to know any but swells. I'm only a plain business agent, so I mustn't presume to expect you to bow to me if we ever *do* meet by chance."

He said this with such an air of sorrowful feeling that the girl despised herself for her loyalty to Mr. Christopher, but still struggled to be loyal.

"He is not a swell, or smart, or up-to-date at all, but he is a very good, honourable man, mother says, and if he can put up with such a stupid little thing as I am, he ought to receive the thanks of all my family and friends, for I have been rather trying to them."

"Will you ask me to your wedding, Sylvia?"

"Dick, you know I *can't* do that—mother wouldn't let me; besides, would you like—to—come—and see me *married*?"

"Dick, will you come and hand the cake and bread-and-butter to Miss Warrener?" said his mother's voice from the tea-table.

Dick rose and crossed the room with a military, swaggering stride that he had recently acquired and found remarkably effective. He handed the cake and bread-and-butter to Miss Warrener with a bland unconscious smile that made her feel *almost* sure (not quite) that she could not have seen him in shady, not to say disreputable, circumstances little more than a year ago. Then he spoke, and his voice and accent made her *quite* sure that she had been stupidly in error in associating him for one moment with Dick the audacious tramp.

"I was at school with a fellow called Warrener—I wonder if, by any chance, he was related to you?" he said very suavely, taking advantage of his mother being engaged in an earnest low-toned conversation with Sylvia. It was disturbing to him, therefore, when Mrs. Ogilvie said, before she could reply:

"What school was that, Dick? I never heard you had a school-fellow called Warrener."

"And I never had a brother," Belle said, and this statement spared him the necessity of going into detail and composing more falsehoods.

"Hadn't you really?" he replied with much interest. "He was a cousin, perhaps; his people used to live at Hyde Park Gate, I think. Does that happen to be where you live?"

"No, I'm a country bumpkin," Belle laughed. "We live down at Prior Common; my father is the rector," she found herself explaining, rather to her own astonishment.

"Prior Common, really!" he said, and his air of simulated interest was very polite, but so evidently, she thought, simulated that Belle felt surer than before that he had nothing in common with the tramp saving similarity of physique. Still, the likeness was remarkable between this well-groomed gentleman and the ragged wretch whom she had befriended to her cost.

"Do you know a place called Prior Dene, or Dene Prior? I am not sure which it is," he went on, disregarding the eloquent glances which Sylvia was unwisely permitting herself to steal at him, and giving his full attention to Miss Warrener for some reason which he could hardly define. Pretty, sparkling, spontaneous Sylvia was a far more attractive object in his eyes than the good-looking grave girl whom Mrs. Stanmer had spoken of

as "that hoyden Belle Warrener" on that memorable day when Belle had jumped over the hedge into the water-meadow in order to convey food and sustenance to an apparently starving man.

"Yes, I know Dene Prior well," she said steadily, though the bright colour which quickly flushed her face showed that the name of the place had the power to touch her. "The Stanmers, who live there, are old friends of ours. Why do you ask?"

There was a tone of suspicion in her last words, which had been roused by a curiously vindictive smile on Mr. Ogilvie's face.

"I asked out of idle curiosity, I am afraid," he said carelessly. "It struck me when you spoke of Dene Common that your father's parish must be near this Dene Prior, where I happened to call a little more than a fortnight ago."

"Do you know them?" Belle questioned.

"Not in your sense of the word. Arthur Stanmer, Esq., of Dene Prior, is not likely to be an acquaintance of 'Our Mr. Ogilvie,' as I am called in the business house for which I'm an agent. I only called to solicit orders, and if I had been a Pariah dog or a ticket-of-leave man I couldn't have been received with scunter courtesy by that specimen of the fine young English gentleman, Mr. Stanmer."

He spoke bitterly, almost viciously, and Belle's spirit was in arms at once at the aspersion on the good breeding of her old playfellow and—lover.

"It's not like Mr. Stanmer to show scant courtesy to any one, man or dog, however down in the world either of them may be."

"Indeed! Now I should have thought him rather an arrogant, intolerant sort of young gentleman—one who has been so accustomed to have his servile attendants and down-trodden serfs bowing down before him at every turn, that he has got into the habit of looking upon himself as very superior porcelain, and on every other man who doesn't happen to be a wealthy squire as very common clay."

"Why do you dislike him?" Belle asked wonderingly.

"I don't dislike him. Did I speak as if I did? On the contrary, I hope to improve my acquaintance with him, and show him that I am not quite such a despicable cad as he seemed to consider me the other day."

"How like the expression of his eyes and mouth is to that other one!" Belle thought nervously, as he uttered his wish to

become better acquainted with Mr. Stanmer in rather a threatening tone. Then she ridiculed herself for the passing qualm, and felt again that it was only because her nerves were shaken and weakened by hope deferred about Arthur that she could, even by the wildest effort of her imagination, associate self-assured, easy-mannered, prosperous Mr. Ogilvie, the 'commercial man,' with the scamp who had treated her so ungratefully.

"What have you two found to talk about so earnestly all this while?" Sylvia asked, breaking away from Mrs. Ogilvie at last and crossing over to Belle's side.

"Mr. Ogilvie knows a little of my part of the country, that's all," Belle explained briefly.

"And where does your part of the country chance to be, my dear?" Mrs. Ogilvie asked, with the privileged familiarity of age.

"Prior Common; it's a village about five or six miles from Richmond."

This information conveyed no very fixed idea of its locality to Mrs. Ogilvie, whose excursions into "the country" had been limited to Greenwich Park, Hampstead Heath and the Crystal Palace. However, she was possessed of a fair share of suppressed power, and so rarely betrayed her ignorance as a more loquacious woman would have done.

"Oh, indeed! I suppose my son has been travelling there. My son is a great traveller—not a quiet stay-at-home like his old mother."

She smiled proudly and affectionately at him, and Belle was more than ever shocked at having thought of him in conjunction with the tramp, when she saw how lovingly his mother regarded him.

"That is so," he said complacently. Then he went on with a ring of feeling in his voice that almost made Miss Warrener like him: "Though there would be some excuse for a fellow who stayed as long as he could in a home that is made as pleasant as you always make home to me, mother."

There was one of those little pauses after this which are apt to ensue after any outbreak of the slightest genuine feeling, and which are so extremely awkward to break. It was broken presently by Sylvia saying:

"I suppose we ought to go home now, Belle. Mother means to dine earlier to-day to get to Toole's in time."

"Shall I see you again before you are married?" Mr. Ogilvie took an opportunity of whispering, as Sylvia shook hands with him.

"I suppose not." There was as much desolation of spirit in her reply as if he had spoken of her funeral.

"Then there is nothing left for me to do but to wish you now every happiness that can fall to the lot of mortal woman."

"Thanks!" she gurgled out, and if she had attempted another word she would have broken down and cried, and under the stern glance which his mother was bending on them both she did not dare to do that. He turned from her abruptly and spoke to Belle.

"Good afternoon, Miss Warrener. Will you condescend to recognize me if I call at the Rectory in the way of business when I am in your neighbourhood again?"

"Of course I will."

"And will you tell your friend Mr. Stanmer that, having seen my mother and my home, you don't believe me to be quite such an outcast as he seemed disposed to consider me?"

"I won't encourage you to talk such nonsense by answering it," Belle said warmly, and then the girls went on their way home, steeped in silence and engrossed by their own respective thoughts.

The silence remained unbroken until they got out of the omnibus and turned into Blessington Terrace. Then Sylvia said:

"I'm sorry we met Dick to-day."

"Why?"

"Because he is quite well disposed to console himself with you for the loss of me," Sylvia said, a flash of jealousy brightening up her dejected mood.

"Ah! but I'm not disposed to console myself with him, I can assure you."

"Do you think *that's* any comfort to me? It's what *he* feels that I care about, not what you feel for him. In fact, I think I should like it better if you did fall in love with him, and he was cool and indifferent to you. I do, indeed; it would soothe me, I fancy, and I want something to soothe me. Don't think me ill-natured. Seeing Dick Ogilvie always does upset me horribly, for I can't help contrasting him with Mr. Christopher, and

then——” The sentence ended in a gulp, and the girl hurriedly wiped her moist eyelashes—she had discreetly not allowed her tears to flow beyond these latter—as they reached her mother’s door.

“Don’t see him again, dear,” Belle murmured kindly; “it’s very bad for you. And after all, you’ll be much happier with Mr. Christopher. It won’t be feverish happiness, I admit,” Belle went on, proudly conscious that she was giving excellent advice, “but that would vanish when the first glamour was over. Now with Mr. Christopher you will have solid comfort——”

Sylvia made a grimace, but there was no time to dispute Belle’s proposition. The door was opened; they were told the first dinner-bell had rung, and as they flew upstairs Sylvia cried aloud to Ann to come and help her.

For a few minutes the toilet operations were conducted in silence; then when Sylvia had recovered her breath and the finishing touches were being put to her by Ann, she said with good-tempered defiance:

“I have been to see Mrs. Ogilvie.”

“Oh, indeed, Miss Sylvia,” Ann said, in a tone of stolid indifference.

“I wanted to show one of the nicest-looking elderly ladies in London to Miss Warrener, and my amiable effort was rewarded.”

“Oh, indeed, Miss Sylvia.”

“Won’t you ask ‘how’?”

A slight spasmodic twitch of the muscles of Ann’s face was her sole reply to this.

“I saw Mr. Dick, and as it was quite accidental I’m not to blame,” Sylvia whispered, as the second bell rang and she hurried off in obedience to it.

“I declare, your hand looks quite naked without your ring,” Mrs. Gould remarked discontentedly when they sat down to dinner. “I have had the plumbers in to examine the bath-room escape-pipe, but though there is a small grating, too small for the ring to pass through, a little way down, they can see nothing of it.”

“Never mind,” Sylvia said philosophically.

“I suppose the reason that you don’t worry yourself about it is that you know you so soon will have another, probably a

better one; because Mr. Christopher told me yesterday he shouldn't give you another till he gave you a guard for your wedding ring, so that he may make sure of both you and the ring, you see," Lily suggested happily, to which Sylvia responded with a prompt relapse into real feeling:

"Then he's a stingy old beast."

"That's not at all the way to speak of your future husband, Sylvia," her mother said severely, but the captious, dominant side of Sylvia's character was uppermost now, and she hardened her heart to the warnings of her mother's discretion.

"You used to tell us it was insincere to think one thing and say another, mamma. I think him a stingy old beast for not giving me another ring until he can mount guard over it as well as me. It would be rank hypocrisy and insincerity if I said anything short of that about him."

"Don't you think it will be rather more hypocritical and insincere to marry him as you think that about him?" Belle asked. "If you don't like him best in the world—and you don't—you know you don't——"

Sylvia held up a warning hand.

"If you take all the silly things I say seriously and throw them in my teeth, there will be mischief made," she said. "Mamma, please don't look so grim. Whatever I may think, I will never call Mr. Christopher a stingy old beast again."

(To be continued)

LONDON SOCIETY.

MARCH, 1894.

A Bad Lot.*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLUB DINNER.

THE HONOURABLE JULIAN TEMPLE, as every one who will take the trouble to look him out in Debrett's Peerage will discover, is the second son of the late, and only brother and heir-presumptive of the present Baron Culverdale, of Culverdale Castle, in the county of Berkshire. Having inherited a small but sufficient fortune from his mother, Mr. Temple could afford to be an idle man, and had always been so. His family had wished him to go into Parliament, but he had no personal ambitions; and he had, moreover, so great a scorn of the party tactics, the wire-pulling, the greed of self-advancement, to the total exclusion of all true and patriotic love for the country and the public weal, which are becoming more and more the distinguishing features of the modern politician, that he would have found himself totally out of place in the House of Commons.

His pleasures were therefore his main occupation. He was a keen fisherman and an excellent shot, and he gave himself up to these sports—with the occasional addition of a day's hunting—with the greatest avidity. His headquarters, oddly enough for a man so devoted to country pursuits, were in Piccadilly, where he owned a delightful suite of rooms overlooking the Green Park,

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from whence; he made periodical expeditions to divers parts of England in search of the various sports to which he was addicted.

One can do everything one wants to do, quite as well from London as from any other corner of the world, he was wont to say; and if a man lives in town he keeps his brains awake and his wits keen, and does not degenerate down to the level of a vegetable.

For Julian Temple was not only a sportsman—he was a man of literary tastes as well. He liked to be within touch of the leading minds of the day, and within reach of the reading room of the British Museum. He contributed frequent essays on social and scientific subjects to the best magazines, where under the *nom de plume* of “Jute” he had won for himself an honourable place amongst men of thought and culture. He had even written a novel—a novel of rare power—that was eccentric and weird in plot, and singular and almost uncouth in phraseology—a novel that had transgressed against all the canons of romance, in that it had no heroine and no love in it, and that it did not end with the ringing of the wedding bells. This novel, published anonymously, had been slashed to pieces and covered with contumely by every reviewer in every newspaper in England; but, nevertheless, it had run to a fifth edition; and had he chosen to continue this branch of literary work, it would have laid foundations that would have carried him to a high place amongst the best novelists of the day. But it was characteristic of Julian that he never attempted to write another book of fiction.

He was not, as has been said, in the least ambitious—his only aim was to please himself. He was unmarried, and had every intention of remaining so. He used to say that he had never met the woman yet who would not bore him to death in three weeks; and to be bored was his *bête noire*.

“I should get dead sick of her, you know,” he would say to his friends, when marriage was suggested to him; “it is the way I am constituted; women amuse me for an evening—for a day, perhaps—but for longer they fill me with an intolerable weariness. To meet the same woman every day of my life would be insufferable to me. I do not think it would be fair to any lady to ask her to become my wife, for she would get so upon my nerves after a month that I should be capable of strangling her!”

“Then you have never been in love, Julian?” said a friend

who happened to be dining with him at the Windham Club—the friend was Cecil Roscoe.

“Never, I am happy to say! I do not even know what the words mean. It is probably the reason why I am incapable of writing a good novel.”

There was a third guest at the table, who laughed drily at this remark.

“My dear fellow, let me tell you then, that you have missed one of the greatest incentives to existence. Life without love is like an opera without a melody, like a garden without a flower—or worse still, like a dinner without champagne!” and here Major Pryor lifted his wine-glass between his eyes and the light of the rose-shaded candles. “Let me give you a toast:—Here’s to woman—wilful, wayward, inscrutable, incomprehensible, capricious, captious—yet ever charming woman!”

“I join heartily in your toast, major,” said Cecil, raising his glass—his secret being yet young and untold to his two companions—“I am an advocate of marriage as embodying the safest investment in real happiness that has yet been invented.”

“Oh, marriage! marriage!” repeated Major Pryor depreciatingly, setting down his glass and pushing out his under-lip—“marriage, my dear boy, is quite another matter! I was speaking of woman in the abstract. One can be in love with a dozen women—think of it! the variety, the charm, the novelty!—but, alas! one can only marry one! But for this I should have been a Benedict many years ago. But *one* woman! how depressing, how soul-enslaving! for where is there one woman to be found on earth in whom all the contradictory charms of her delightful sex can possibly be united?”

“Ah, you see, major, you agree with me after all—that is exactly my difficulty,” said Temple with a smile. “To marry means to devote oneself to one woman; therefore I say it is best to leave them all alone.”

“My dear Temple, if there is the same theoretical basis in our opinions, there is a very radical and practical difference in the deductions we each of us draw from them. *Your* arguments lead you to love none of them—*mine* have ever induced me to love them all!”

“Yet, joking apart,” pursued Cecil, who, in virtue of his three-days’-old engagement, took a new and personal interest in the

subject of matrimony—for when a young man has pledged himself to this not unusual step in life, it is common for him to imagine that he is about to perform a great and wonderful action, of which no man can over-estimate the solemn importance—“do you not believe that an early marriage—always supposing that his worldly means are such as to render the step not an imprudent one—is the greatest and best safeguard that a young man can form against the troubles and temptations of life—that, in short, to take a wife who will bring sweetness and graciousness and intelligent companionship into his home, is the strongest security of earthly happiness that a sensible man can have?”

“My dear Roscoe, you are a young man and I am a middle-aged one,” replied Major Pryor with decision, “and I know men and women well, very well indeed—better, perhaps, than you do—and what I say to you is this: an ideal marriage such as you mention is like an ideal Liberal Government—the most beautiful theory that the imagination of man ever conceived. But you can’t get it, my dear sir, you can’t get it! Human nature won’t run to it. And if a man rushes into marriage with a woman he knows nothing about—a pretty creature, perhaps, who has caught his fancy and captured his senses—it is self-evident that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred she must turn out to be totally different to that which he has supposed her to be, and there he is, poor fellow, tied and bound for life to her! That’s what I say to you young men—‘Look before you leap.’ Marriage is a d—d serious thing, Roscoe. A man should know beforehand, not only all about the woman herself, but all about her family and their tastes and tendencies. There are certain things that are frequently hereditary—petty vices, faults of temper, moral obliquities—that are almost certain to reappear at stated intervals in successive generations. Let a man be quite sure that his future wife has a clean record in the past lives of her progenitors—let him, at least, be forewarned as to her possible failings and weaknesses, ere he commits the irrevocable folly of binding himself to her for the rest of their natural lives.”

During the latter portion of this speech Cecil had been drawing patterns with his fork on the table-cloth. It was during the pause between the ending of the dinner and the arrival of the coffee. Major Pryor’s harangue had started lightly enough, but

he had struck a more serious note in his concluding words ; they impressed the younger man more than he would have cared to admit. There seemed to be an echo in them of Mrs. Torrens' words of ill-omen :

“ Remember that these things are in the blood, and reappear in families down to the third and fourth generations,” she had said.

Was it not in substance exactly what Major Pryor was saying now ?

“ Yet *one* bad instance should not surely make one condemn a whole race !” he said to himself, a sense of justice struggling within him with a sense of disquieting uneasiness ; “ and for the life of me I can't make out why the Fenshire people are so down upon the family !” Then suddenly a strange fancy came into his head. Major Algernon Pryor was a very well-known man in London society ; he was probably sixty-five, but he was so well preserved and so well got up that he looked barely fifty. Yet his recollections carried him far back to the beginning of the present reign. For many years his well-known figure, trim and slight and faultlessly dressed, had haunted day by day the well-known purlieus of Pall Mall and Piccadilly, and he was supposed to be a veritable walking encyclopædia concerning the histories and doings of his fellow-creatures for over a quarter of a century. His lynx eyes had watched and observed and made notes of many things that other people less observant might not have remarked. There are, indeed, many facts and many doings that a persistent perambulation of the sunny sides of Piccadilly, St. James's Street and Pall Mall, can bring home to, and impress upon a thoughtful mind. Major Pryor had not been at all slow to take notes of all these interesting matters. And that which he noted he very seldom forgot. He knew the family history of everybody who had a family or a history worth knowing about. He could tell you without a moment of hesitation who had married who, and what had become of all their younger sons and daughters for the last thirty years. He had a memory for scandals and for gossip that was positively astonishing. Divorces, elopements, bankruptcies, breach of promise cases, seemed to be stored up in his mind, labelled and ticketed and dated, all ready to be produced as good as new at the shortest notice. And to

do him justice, he never invented or exaggerated ; his information was generally correct and thoroughly to be depended on. It was with a swift recollection of all this, that, upon an impulse of the moment, Cecil Roscoe said to him suddenly :

“ Look here, Major Pryor, you are one of those men who know everything and everybody. I wonder if you can tell me anything about some people of the name of Forrester ? ”

It must be recollected that neither of the two men at the table had been informed of Cecil's engagement. Pryor, indeed, was only an acquaintance, to whom he would hardly have mentioned it ; but as the major was going on after dinner to keep some social engagement, Cecil's purpose had been to tell his news to Julian Temple, who was an intimate and valued friend, after the older man's departure.

Nothing pleased Major Pryor better than to be consulted upon a point of personal history. He put down his coffee cup at once, adjusted his eyeglass into his eye and addressed himself with interest to the subject.

“ Forrester, did you say ? Oh, dear me, yes, I knew them all. There were the Forresters of Killmaney, who were the Irish branch, and the Forresters of Ringwood, who intermarried. William Forrester of Ringwood, grandfather of the present man, was in Parliament, and was made a baronet when Lord John Russell's government went out. Of the Killmaney branch there were three or four sons, but I don't know that any of them are alive now. There was one who was drowned at sea, and two others who died in divers ways, and I used to know the youngest, poor Jim Forrester, of the 60th, who was killed in the Soudan, very well indeed—a very nice chap. The present baronet, Sir Robert, used to be a good sort of fellow ; he married a Miss Walters—awful ugly woman, with a nose like a rhinoceros. He married her for her money, and I hear she keeps him in fearful order.”

“ Is there not an old Lady Forrester also ? ”

“ Yes, yes, certainly ; I am coming to her. The Dowager, Bob's mother, she lives in Wimpole Street—a painted old Jezebel ! I had tea with her one day last week. There isn't anything that old woman doesn't know and wouldn't do ! She'd give Beelzebub a stone and a beating ! But she's capital company ! ”

“ And she has another son, has she not ? ”

"Yes, to be sure. Gordon was her youngest son. He was a wonderfully good-looking chap; 'Handsome Gordie' he was called. All the women used to run after him when he was a lad. But he made a mess of his life; and disappeared from society a long time ago. I haven't seen him about for years. I believe he lives somewhere down in the Fen country, at a tumble-down old place left him by some distant cousin, to whose family it ultimately reverts. He can't have got a penny to spend on the place and, I hear, has to let off all the land up to the very front door of the house, and his mother told me that the place is going to rack and ruin. After he came into it and went to live there a Mrs. Gordon suddenly appeared on the scenes, and it all came out that he had been married privately for some years back to a burlesque chorus girl. He committed the folly of taking his wife down to Fenshire and of trying to get the neighbourhood to receive her. But of course the women wouldn't so much as look at her; your respectable women are so charitable, you know! Well, perhaps they were right as it turned out, for after a few years the poor woman got tired of it, I suppose, for she bolted with somebody—I forget who—and a good riddance for Gordon, I should say. By the way, Temple, I wonder you don't remember him, although of course he must be a good ten or twelve years your senior. He used to be about a great deal with a man called Darley—a yachting man. Surely you remember Vane Darley? He and Gordon Forrester were inseparable at one time."

"It can scarcely be a recommendation to any man to have been a friend of Colonel Vane Darley, from all I have been told of that gentleman!" said Julian rather contemptuously.

"Oh, there I differ from you, Temple! I knew Darley well at one time. He was a splendid chap, generous and kind-hearted to a fault; he would do anything in the world for a friend; no one in trouble ever went to him in vain, and he was the most genial host and the most delightful companion in the world. I don't suppose you could have found a man who had more friends than Vane Darley in all England; he was the most popular man of his day. He had only one fault——"

"Ah! and that one fault to my mind counteracts all the rest!" interrupted Temple with severity.

"Oh, my dear fellow," and Major Pryor chuckled a little to

himself, "we can't all of us be anchorites and saints like you ; your school of morality is—well, really a *leettle* too strict for the present generation. It is not given to all men to be tempted alike, you must remember. Although, of course, I am bound to admit that poor old Vane was not altogether immaculate in his dealings with women. His love affairs, I will frankly state, were numberless, and some of them at least were discreditable to him."

"He was an unprincipled libertine," said Julian with emphasis. "Not one of his apologists, my dear Pryor, has ever, it seems to me, been able to get beyond that fact."

The major shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"You ought to bear in mind," he replied, "that he made a very unfortunate start in life. He was married at two-and-twenty to a woman who was wholly uncongenial to him, and they parted by mutual consent within the year. That sort of thing, you will allow, handicaps a man pretty severely. The marriage was a patched up affair from the first, a sort of family arrangement, and they did not get on in the least. She was one of your good women who see crimes in everything, and who drive more men to the devil than any other class of women upon earth. She thought everything wicked ; his yacht, his hunters, his shooting. She wanted him to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor. She looked upon theatres as the portals of the infernal regions, and upon race meetings as foregatherings of incarnate fiends. When she found that poor old Vane wouldn't give up everything and adopt her peculiar views, she told him that she couldn't possibly imperil her immortal soul by continuing to dwell in the tents of Belial. So she went over to America and founded a Society for the suppression of vice in young men. She is doing it out there to this day, I believe."

Cecil Roscoe sat smoking his cigarette and listening. It was the first time that he had ever heard of the name of Vane Darley ; it would have been happy for him if he had never heard it again. He was not particularly interested in the sins of this Colonel Vane Darley, and he did not want the conversation to drift away from the Forresters. He took advantage of the first pause in the major's reminiscences to remark :

"Mr. Gordon Forrester has daughters?"

"Ah, yes, very likely ; in fact I remember, now you mention it, that the old lady has spoken to me of her grand-daughters,

but I know nothing about them myself, although I fancy, from what she said about them, that they are not a particularly strait-laced lot. In fact, she was just going to tell me about some adventure or other that one of them had once—some dreadful scrape she said it was, connected with some fellow. I suppose it was something of a spicy kind of nature, for the old reprobate laughed and winked a good deal—but unluckily some one came in just as she was beginning to relate the story to me; so, unfortunately, I never heard it.”

Cecil's colour rose; he put down his coffee cup into the saucer, and his hand trembled as he did so.

“I am sorry you did not hear the story, major; it might have been—of use to me.”

“Of use?” repeated the major laughingly; “not much *use*, I fancy, though I daresay it would have amused you.”

Cecil laughed a little harshly.

“I ought to tell you, major, that I have an object beyond idle curiosity in making these inquiries of you concerning these people. The fact is, a very great friend of mine—the most intimate friend, in fact, that I have in the world—whose welfare I have very much at heart—is engaged to be married to one of Gordon Forrester's daughters.”

Major Pryor had got up to wish his host good-night. When he had made his adieux to him he turned and faced Cecil Roscoe squarely.

“My dear Roscoe, if you have your intimate friend's welfare so keenly at heart, you can just give him my advice upon the subject. Tell him to go to Timbuctoo or to New South Wales, or anywhere else that will put a wide berth between himself and a daughter of Gordon Forrester's. No man in his senses should take a wife from such a stock as that. They are a bad lot, and that's my last word about them, and you can tell your friend that I said so.”

Cecil remained staring in front of him in gloomy silence for several minutes after Major Pryor's departure. At last Julian Temple, who was watching him attentively, leant across the corner of the table and touched him on the arm.

“What's wrong, Cecil?”

Cecil started, and looked up at his friend with rather a vacant smile.

"Nothing much, old man—only—the major's last remarks are not very inspiring. The fact is—the 'intimate friend'—doesn't exist—it's myself. I—am engaged to a daughter of Gordon Forrester's."

Mr. Temple uttered no exclamation. He only examined the end of his cigar in silence with deep attention.

"Can you get out of it?" he said at last.

"No—and, what is more, I don't want to. The fact is, Temple, I love the girl."

"I know nothing about love," said Julian quickly—it was the second time he had made the same remark that evening—"but I hope I know a little about honour, and I know that if a man cannot take a step of that kind without a moral descent, he had better stop short of it before it is too late."

"As there is a God above us, Julian," said Cecil solemnly and fervently, "I believe the girl to be as good and pure as an angel from heaven."

"Then stick to her, Cecil, and God bless you."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE LITTLE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE."

NELL stood looking out of her bedroom window on the Saturday afternoon. From the upper windows of Marshlands House there could be seen, far away across the flat country, the fretted twin spires of Fenchester Cathedral, that shot up out of the dead level of the plain, tall and slender and pearly grey, against the sky. Nell was looking at them now—they were familiar to her from childhood. All her life she had looked out of the same latticed window of the same tiny bedroom, across the water meadows where the Laze wound its slow and sleepy way, trending away in graceful sweeps and curves towards the faint outline of the cathedral city in the distance.

There was not a tree, not a shrub, not a clump of pollard willows in all the wide expanse, that she did not know and love—that had not been in some way connected with her dreams and her longings and her fancies.

And now, she said to herself, she was going to leave them all! How soon she could not tell—probably very soon. This

long chapter of her life was to be closed, and a new story was to begin.

It was to her, like the adventuring of a ship into an unknown sea. Yet there was none of that gay glad confidence in her mind that should help to float the barque as she puts forth alone upon the waters of an untried ocean. Nell did not quite know how it was going to be with her; although she did not regret the step she had taken. Cecil had seemed to her to be an enthusiastic lover; his eagerness had infected her a little, his passion had almost carried her away. In that first flush of accepted love there had been something so ardent about his fervour, so boyish about his joy and gladness, that half her doubts and uncertainties had been swept away by the rush of it.

After all, she had said to herself, it is good to be loved like that! good to be taken on trust—to be met with a faith that is so deliciously blind, with a trust so implicit and so entire. To refuse such a love—so rare, so pure, so true—would indeed be foolishness!

“And yet,” she said to herself aloud—“and yet the pity of it is, that with all this I don’t love him!”

She was leaning out of the casement window waiting for him to come.

It was “chill October.” The skies were grey and heavy, the fitful breeze was sad and rain-laden, the brown leaves whirled in little eddies along the garden paths. There had been a frost in the night, and since last week the blackened dahlia blossoms drooped their sodden heads towards the bosom of the cold sad earth, whilst even the bright colours of the chrysanthemums had paled and faded beneath the nipping finger of winter’s advance guard.

Nell did not feel the cold—she was country-bred and inured to sudden changes of climate. And her heart was warm enough—warm and glad. “He is a dear fellow,” she said aloud, almost as though to impress it upon herself, “and he adores me! When I am his wife I shall, I am sure, be perfectly happy. Only, let us be married soon—as soon as he likes, for I don’t want to have too long a time to think about it. I might think too much. I might—I might change my mind!”

Far away, down the straight white road, she saw the dog-cart that had been sent to meet him, and at the same time

Dottie's voice, in no softened accents, shouted out to her from below :

"First favourite romps in—come along down, Nell!"

Then the wild barking of Millie's dogs, and four canine bodies hurled themselves in a mass through the open hall door into the road.

Nell ran lightly and gladly downstairs. She caught up her hat and jacket and put them on quickly as she went.

"He has come by the early train, after all!" she thought, "and we shall have time for a walk together before it gets dark."

In the hall, in which was the billiard table, Dottie and Mr. Popham, of the 110th, were having a desultory game together, whilst Millie, attired in a well-worn habit, all ready for a scamper across the fields, stood tapping her boot with her riding-crop on the door-step, and talking to a lanky young man on a still more lanky screw who awaited her outside.

"As soon as ever Nell's mash arrives from the station I shall get my mare," she was saying to this gentleman. "I'll tell Bill to put the pony on the pillar rein and to get the saddle on Bess at once. But you see, Captain Toulmin, nothing is of any importance in this house just now but Nell's mash—he's number one."

"Oh, Millie," remonstrated Nell, coming up behind her in time to hear the last words and blushing a rosy red with mingled confusion and vexation at the name applied to her lover, "I do wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"My dear girl, it's perfectly true. I assure you, Captain Toulmin, that we've all gone clean out of our minds; we've been standing mentally and morally on our heads, in fact, ever since last Sunday. It's the first husband any one of us has caught—the first nibble, in fact, at the fly of our virgin charms. All you soldiers, you see, you are dear things, but you none of you want to marry us. It's disheartening, you know, when we try so hard to please you. Now, *why* don't you want to marry me, Captain Toulmin?"

"Oh, my dear Miss Millie," and poor Captain Toulmin literally gasped, for he was a new-comer belonging to a regiment that had only just arrived at Fenchester, and was not quite so well accustomed to the Forresterian style of pleasantry as the

habitués of the house, and he was a prosaic young man who took everything *au grand sérieux*, "I—well really," he stammered confusedly, "I should be only too proud and happy, don't you know—only, of course, I am totally unworthy—quite unfit to aspire to such honour and happiness. I—I should never dare, you know."

"Oh, well, you just get up your pluck and propose ; you don't know what you can do till you try, and I give you my solemn word of honour that I'll accept you on the spot, and, if you do, what's more, I'll marry you this day week in Fenchester Cathedral."

The unfortunate captain looked for a moment at her as though he would have tumbled off his steed with terror, and Millie laughed her gay noisy laugh at the sight of his panic-stricken face.

"My dear Miss Millicent," said the unfortunate young man, "the fact is, I really can't afford to get married—nothing on earth I should like better, I assure you, but I can't afford it."

At which Millie laughed louder and longer than ever.

"Oh, you'll be the death of me, Captain Toulmin !" she cried. "I really think you are quite the funniest man I ever met. But peace, let us dissemble, here comes the son-in-law elect of the house. None of your larks, please, in the presence of Mr. Cecil Roscoe ; he is an exceedingly proper young man, and he would not approve of you at all."

The unfortunate Toulmin, who had quite failed to see the point of the joke, or why Millie considered him to be so very funny, but who felt somehow that he had escaped a grave peril, retired thankfully into the background, whilst a very shabby cart and a rough-coated pony, driven by the one groom of the establishment, in a livery coat of such amazing age and greasiness that it positively shone, drew up in style before the hall door.

Ten minutes later, Cecil, having got through the necessary greetings to the other members of his future wife's family, was glad to find himself walking by her side along the high road.

"We will go up to the farm, I think," said Nell, as they started. "We still call it the home-farm, you know, although papa had to let it years ago to a farmer named Wilkes ; they supply us still with milk and butter. Dottie and Mr. Popham were going into the village, so we won't go that way ; she is going to telegraph

about a horse she wants to back, and there go Millie and Captain Toulmin across the hurdles," and she pointed to a couple of riders scampering like mad creatures over hedges and ditches in the direction of the town. "It will be quieter on the road to the farm."

They walked on almost in silence till they came to the bridge over the Laze. Here, that natural instinct which invariably makes people linger, and look over the parapet at the running water below, whilst crossing a bridge, caused them both to stop.

With a woman's ready intuition, Nell had been aware for some moments past that Cecil had something on his mind. When they came to the bridge she faced him smilingly as they leant together over the stream.

"Well, and what have you to say to me to-day, Cecil? You are wonderfully silent."

"I have a great deal to say to you," he answered with rather a troubled brow.

"What is it?" she asked quickly. "You have told your mother, of course; what has she said?"

"Of course you must remember that I am an only child, and that my mother has always had an exaggerated idea of my value in the matrimonial market," said Cecil, with an uneasy laugh. "I daresay a royal princess or a Rothschild heiress would scarcely have satisfied her ambitions with respect to me!"

"Then she is not pleased at your engagement?" said Nell, and her heart began to thump almost audibly. Nell knew all about her mother's origin in these days, and although she, as well as her sisters, believed her to be dead, she was as well aware as any one else that the world treasures these unpleasant memories with an imperishable ardour.

Cecil was silent. He was truthful, and he could not conscientiously say that his mother was pleased. He was picking up the little bits of crumbling mortar from between the bricks, and dropping them one by one over into the turbid waters of the Laze.

"Look here, Cecil," said Nell at last, when the silence between them threatened to become almost awkward—"are you quite sure that you don't agree with your mother, at the bottom of your heart? I can quite see that I am not a good match for you. It isn't only that I have no money—there are other things (we need not discuss them, you and I; but I know them, and

you know them)—well, sometimes I think that second thoughts are best ; and if since last Sunday you have changed your mind and have come to take a different view of things——”

“Oh, Nell, Nell!” cried the young man, turning round upon her sharply, with a ring of real pain in his voice, “how can you think that I could change in a week? Why do you say such a thing to me?” He took her hands into his and wrung them hard. “Do you doubt my love so much as all that?”

He was her fervent lover once more ; the implied threat of severance in her words had frightened him in earnest, for he loved her truly—only, he wanted to love her in his own way.

Nell was melted—the look of pain in his eyes, the clutch of his hands upon hers was real enough.

“Forgive me, Cecil,” she said penitently ; for that is always the essence of a woman’s nature—to beg for forgiveness from the man when he has committed the offence! It was Cecil, not she, who had started the subject ; and yet it was she who rushed in and took all the blame. “Forgive me!” she cried again.

He was graciously pleased to do so.

“You don’t suppose, do you, that I only came down to Marshlands to-day in order to break off our engagement?—I, who have been counting the days and the hours until I saw you again! Look here, Nell ; if you want any proof of the injustice of such a thought, let me show you what I have brought for you.” He drew a small parcel out of his pocket—a tiny box containing a ring—a half-hoop of glittering diamonds.

Nell uttered a cry of delight. She had never possessed a ring in her life. He took her left hand in his and slipped the ring upon her third finger ; then he lifted the hand to his lips and kissed it tenderly. It was altogether a lover-like little scene, and seemed for the moment entirely to efface the impression of those half-spoken words of trouble that had preceded it.

As they stood thus side by side—she holding out her hand so as to admire the glittering circlet on her finger, with all a woman’s natural pleasure in a new trinket, and he looking down fondly and proudly at her—a red gleam of stormy sunset shot suddenly through a rift in the grey banked clouds to the west. The shaft of vivid light fell upon the girl, shining straight into her bright eyes and turning the bronze-brown of her hair into gold. The

diamonds upon her hand leapt into a sudden life, emitting sparks of green and red and yellow in vivid pulsations, as though in answer to the dazzling message of the sunset; and with them also those other diamonds, that she had worn for so many years, shot forth, too, their star-like rays from the bracelet upon her arm.

Cecil noticed the tiny watch in its glittering setting for the first time.

"That is a lovely bracelet you have, Nell. Where did you get it?"

Half-a-minute's pause. Nell lifted her wrist a little higher, and looked at it as though she, too, saw it for the first time.

"Shall I tell him—or not?" went through her mind quickly. And the answer came almost instinctively. It would have been a very difficult story to tell of herself—she was not at all proud of it—in fact, to a young man, even though he was her lover, such a story was almost impossible to repeat—there had always been a shame about it in her own mind—there would certainly have been anger and indignation in his. Why rake up so dark a chapter of her past? Then, again—how, after such a recital, could she possibly account for having kept the watch and worn it ever since? That intangible something in her own heart which connected the gift of graceless Vane Darley, not with himself at all, but with the shattered romance of her childish days, was a thing that would have been totally incomprehensible to most men, and more than all would it have been so to such a man as Cecil Roscoe.

"Dottie says the stones are paste," she answered evasively, just to gain a moment of time; and then she added quite indifferently, "it was given me long ago by an old friend of my father's."

Cecil dismissed the subject from his mind—he had just now other matters upon it which absorbed and troubled him; so that he thought about Nell's bracelet no longer.

The red shaft of sunset grew pale in the western sky, and the lovers walked on together across the water meadows.

Then at last Cecil approached the real difficulty that weighed upon him.

"I want you to be very sensible and reasonable, my dearest," he began somewhat diffidently. "You see my mother is almost

ludicrously fond of me, and I want you to be patient with her, and to make allowances for her."

"With the best intentions in the world, I don't see what opportunity I have of doing so unless I make her acquaintance," answered Nell, with a little laugh that was not exactly encouraging in its tone. Once more her quick instincts told her that there was something yet to come, behind the elaboration of these preambles.

"That is exactly what I am coming to, darling. I want you to know her. I think—indeed, I feel certain—that directly she sees you she will love you. Who could help it, you know?"

"How and where is she to see me?" inquired Nell in a matter-of-fact voice, ignoring the last lover-like insinuation altogether.

"Well, I thought perhaps you might come up to town for a day or two this week, could you not?"

"Certainly, Cecil, if you wish it. Papa would be very glad to let me go. Where am I to stay?"

"I—I thought—your grandmother, perhaps, could receive you, could she not?"

Then there was no welcoming message from Cecil's mother! Nell felt it bitterly—it seemed to make it all so difficult and so hard for her, if his mother did not hold out her hands in warmth and kindness to her! Nell had hoped that Mrs. Roscoe would have written or sent some kind message, and if she was to come to London, it would have seemed natural that she should have invited her to stay with her.

"I wish to goodness my mother had asked you to Rutland Gate," broke in Cecil, as though divining her thought, "for of course I should have liked you to be with her immensely; but she did not suggest it. Still, if you are actually in London I am quite sure that she will call upon you and be kind, and we must trust to time to do the rest."

He looked so distressed and worried that Nell was sorry for him. After all, she reflected, it was not his fault. He had no doubt had a bad time of it with his mother; she would not make it worse for him by taking offence. She would try to be sweet and gentle and diplomatic generally, to please him and help him to make things smooth and straight.

"Oh, never mind about that, Cecil, dear," she said quite brightly and pleasantly. "I daresay it was not convenient to your mother to

invite me to stay in Rutland Gate. I quite understand. And besides, I really think it will be much better for me to go to granny's. I can go to her quite easily. Moreover, there is my *trousseau* to see about," she added, with a little blushing laugh. "Granny has written to me, very kindly offering to give me my things, and so, as she is rather a tetchy old lady, I think she would be better pleased if I were to stay with her. I can arrange to go up to Wimpole Street on Thursday if you like, for, you know, the ordering and fitting on of frocks is a matter of some time, and I may as well begin to see about them at once."

Cecil looked straight in front of him. There was, perhaps, a little sense of shame in his mind. Nell was not looking at him. She was stealing furtive glances at her new engagement ring. When he began to speak again she hardly listened to the first few words.

"It is precisely on that subject I wanted to speak to you, Nell—the subject of our wedding, I mean."

"Yes?" and Nell smiled confidently and thought to herself, "I must stand out for at least six weeks to get my things ready, whatever he may say."

"I don't think you need trouble about your *trousseau* just at present, dear."

Nell looked up startled, and the hand, with its diamond circlet, fell rigidly down by her side.

"The fact is, my mother thinks," he went on somewhat hurriedly, "and I agree with her, that our engagement has been a very rapid affair. We have not known each other very long, have we?—in fact, we hardly know each other at all. It would be better, I am sure, that we should have a longer time to become mutually acquainted. We shall know our own minds ever so much better if we wait a little. It has all been so very sudden, has it not? And if we put our marriage off—say till Easter, we shall have all that time to learn to know one another better. I have promised my mother, in short, that it will not take place before Easter."

There fell upon Nell's heart a cold and paralyzing chill. It was not sorrow, certainly—it was not even disappointment or dismay; it was only a numb and deadly indifference.

"It will never take place at all!" was the thought in her heart, but she did not speak a word. She walked on by his side for some minutes in absolute silence, her eyes fixed upon the twin

grey spires in the distance that had by this time very nearly faded away into the grey gloom of the evening sky behind them.

"It has turned very cold," she said after a long time, with a little shiver. "Let us go home."

"But what do you say, Nell, dear? What do you say about it?" he asked uneasily, for her silence disturbed him.

"Say?—oh, you mean about knowing each other better. Oh, yes, I think it most desirable, and we are learning to know each other better every hour, are we not?"

"And about our marriage taking place at Easter, Nell? You quite understand, do you not? And you will agree?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I will agree to anything you like, Cecil," she answered indifferently.

And they walked back towards the house in silence. This time there was no lingering on the bridge.

"He is not in the least what I took him to be," she said to herself. "He has heard something horrid about us, and he is frightened. He is half-hearted, and cautious, and calculating. Oh, give me a blackguard who is in earnest!" she thought passionately and hotly.

A very ill-regulated and reprehensible thought, surely. But then, as Major Pryor had said, the Forresters of Marshlands were a bad lot, and had, no doubt, natural leanings towards iniquity!

CHAPTER IX.

THE WICKED OLD WOMAN IN WIMPOLE STREET.

To any one not very much accustomed to London distances it seems a long way between Wimpole Street and Rutland Gate, more especially when the journey between the two is undertaken in the dark, by a very nervous young lady by herself in a four-wheeled cab.

Nell thought she would never come to the end of that rackety and draughty drive. She was on her way to dine in Rutland Gate and to be introduced to Cecil's mother. Mrs. Roscoe and Mrs. Torrens had indeed left their cards upon her the day after her arrival in town, which cards Nell had been very sorry indeed to find lying upon the hall table when she came in from her walk.

"If only she had let me know!" she had cried with intense

vexation when she had come in, "I would have stayed at home the whole afternoon to have seen her!"

"Well, you wouldn't have been any the nearer it for that, my dear," answered her grandmother with a laugh; "for they did not even ask for you. They drove up together in the open carriage, both of them, Mrs. Roscoe with her silly weak face and receding chin, and that hateful Torrens woman, who has a nose like an eagle's beak. I used to know them both as girls, and they were glad enough to come to my house in those days. I peeped at them from behind the muslin curtains. They never even asked if you were in; they just shovelled in their cards and drove away."

"Oh, grandmamma, how unkind of them!" cried Nell, the tears of distress rushing into her lovely eyes.

"Oh, you needn't take it to heart, Nell!" said the old lady cheerfully. "It wasn't meant as a slight to *you*. But catch either of those women putting her nose inside my door! They had just as soon face the devil in person, horns and hoofs and tail, than come up into my drawing-room. Selina Torrens is about the most hard-hearted and ill-natured woman in London. But she sets herself up nowadays to be religious, and she looks down upon me as an unregenerate sinner, and that silly Louise Roscoe does everything her sister-in-law tells her to do. Oh, they are a nice couple, those two!"

"You make me very nervous, Granny. How am I to get on with such people?" said poor Nell, with a failing heart.

"Why, just stand up for yourself, my dear, and hold your own. After all, you are not going to marry the man's mother or his aunt!"

Later on in the day came Cecil himself to call upon his lady love. And Cecil had asked for Lady Forrester, and had come upstairs to call upon her, in the most approved and correct fashion. He found her very much what Major Pryor had described her to be—a made-up and rouged little old woman with a wig of fair curly hair, false teeth, and a still wonderful figure. She was not at all the sort of old lady that Cecil had been accustomed to, and the accounts of her wickedness and worldliness had made him secretly dread the interview. Yet he was bound to admit that she was extremely agreeable and cordial in her greeting, although he hardly knew whether to be amused or bewildered by her conversation. When he was shown into the room, Lady Forrester

was sitting alone. Nell did not happen to be present. The old lady was playing French Patience by herself upon a card table drawn up in front of her, with a reading lamp upon it.

Lady Forrester did not lay down her cards, but she looked up at him over her gold-rimmed spectacles and held out a little wrinkled hand to him.

"Ah, so you are Nell's young man? I'm very pleased to see you; sit down where I can look at you. So you are engaged to be married to Nell, I hear. Well, I'm very glad of it. I suppose you really do mean to marry her, don't you? You are not going to fight off, I suppose?"

"My dear Lady Forrester, how can you possibly imagine such a dreadful thing of me?" cried Cecil, considerably taken aback by the strangeness of the question, which he hardly knew whether to regard in earnest or as a jest.

"Oh, well, I am very glad it's all right! but one never knows, with you men about town. You are all of you deceivers—nice deceivers for the most part, I grant you. I've always been fond of a nice man—it's a weakness of mine, even in my old age—but when there is any talk of marriage in the air, then all at once one finds you out. There always turn out to be difficulties and impediments of divers kinds; there is a divorced or deserted wife in the background, or the Lord knows what!"

"I assure you, Lady Forrester," said Cecil solemnly, turning quite red at these extraordinary suggestions, "I do not, of course, know the sort of men you have been acquainted with, but speaking for myself, I can say that there are no difficulties or impediments, nor any of those other things you mention, and my dearest hope in life is to make your grand-daughter my wife."

"Oh, well, I am very glad to hear it, I am sure," answered the old lady, nodding at him in a friendly way and laying the queen of spades down upon one of the long rows in front of her. "You don't mind my going on with my game, do you? It is a new kind of Patience I am learning. I can talk all the time I am playing. That is the beauty of Patience; it is no mental strain. Ah! well, I am delighted to hear that you are really going to marry little Nell; she is quite my favourite. And really, it is time those girls got husbands. I wish you could have seen your way to Dottie, for I always think the eldest of a family of girls should go off first. But Dottie is losing her looks; she is

getting rather large and heavy now, and I daresay you preferred Nell."

"Very much indeed," answered Cecil fervently. "In fact, Nell is the only one."

"Oh yes, I quite understand. You are a well brought up young man and the others wouldn't appeal to you, though they seem to have plenty of admirers; but as I was saying, husbands are another matter. However, I agree with you that Nell is the pick of the bunch. Ah! here is Nell! Nell, my dear, I have been making friends with your young man. I like him very much; he is deliciously simple, and takes everything I say quite seriously. I am sure he will make you an excellent husband—serious persons always do."

In all the course of his life Cecil Roscoe had never heard himself called "deliciously simple" before. He had believed himself to be clever, sensible and clear-headed, but a delicious simplicity was the very last attribute he should have imagined himself to possess; yet it was impossible to take offence at Lady Forrester's little sallies. There was a certain *bonhomie* about her—she was so confiding in her dreadful outspokenness, so frankly and naively cynical, that Cecil began to understand why, although she was always described as being so very wicked, yet people always liked to go and see her. She shocked him considerably, but she attracted him at the same time.

"Your mother has called," said Nell to him, after a quiet greeting had passed between them. "I was so very sorry to be out."

"I am very sorry, too. Why does Lady Forrester laugh?" he added aside to her, observing that the old woman had gone off into one of her noiseless chuckles, her face a mass of wrinkles and her shoulders shaking.

"Never mind," said Nell hurriedly, in a low voice, "she laughs at everything."

Then Cecil produced with some pride a telegram from his mother he had just received at his chambers. It was to tell him to invite Nell to dinner in Rutland Gate.

And Nell was pleased to have been invited and promised to go. She had come up to London in a subdued frame of mind. She had taken herself very much to task for the impatience and disappointment which she had felt on Sunday. She had tried

very hard to make excuses for Cecil. She knew that he had lived in another world to herself, a world where order and prudence and forethought were cardinal virtues. It was a world she knew nothing about, but into which she felt dimly, that it would be a good thing for her to enter. To marry well and respectably was now in her power. She saw that it would benefit, not only herself, but her family also, that she should take this step. It would not do to disappoint them all; it would be better not to think too much about ideals and theories. Cecil was good—far too good indeed for her—and as she had promised to marry him, she made up her mind that she would stick to her promise and make the best of those things in him which jarred vaguely and almost intangibly against her innermost self.

So she was very sweet and pleasant to him in this little interview in Wimpole Street. They sat together in the back drawing-room; there was no light save from the other room, and dark masses of heavy old-fashioned furniture surrounded them in their seclusion like ghosts of a past generation. They sat upon a sofa hand in hand, and talked together in whispers, whilst the old lady played her game of Patience at the card table in the front room. She looked like a picture under the circle of the lamp-light, with her wrinkles and her painted face and the yellow curling wig—a picture that might have been called "Greed," or "The Ruling Passion," or "At Monte Carlo," or anything else with which an old woman playing cards can be associated. Every now and then she called out to them, and made little remarks that Nell laughed at, but which made Cecil wince as often as not.

"Don't mind me, I am blind and deaf," or, "Go on spooning, dear turtle-doves; it reminds me of my youth," or, "You tell your aunt, Mr. Roscoe, I shall come to the wedding. I doubt if she'll consent to stand in the same church with me, but I mean to be there, you can tell her."

And then, when Cecil rose to go and wished her good-bye, the old lady said suddenly, turning to her grand-daughter:

"This one is quite sure he hasn't got a wife alive anywhere, Nell," and then she laughed wickedly, whilst it seemed to Cecil that Nell grew red.

What had she meant by "this one?" he said to himself as he walked away homewards across the park. Cecil had thought a

good deal about what Major Pryor had said that evening at dinner at the Windham Club. In spite of himself and of his friend Temple's parting words of encouragement, some of the major's words had haunted him; he could not altogether shake off a vague feeling of uneasiness and doubt.

What had especially rankled in his mind was the allusion which Major Pryor had made to some discreditable story about one of Gordon Forrester's daughters: the story he had said that Lady Forrester had not had the time to relate to him.

Which one of Gordon Forrester's daughters was it over which the wicked old woman in Wimpole Street had winked and nodded and made merry? If it had been Dottie or Millie, Cecil did not very much care; he disliked those two young ladies cordially, and although he did not believe anything worse could be said of them than that they were fast and noisy and somewhat vulgar, he had every intention of dropping them as much as possible as soon as he was married. Nell seemed to him to be so far above them all, and his only desire was to withdraw her altogether from the corrupting influences of her life and surroundings.

"It must have been Dottie or Millie," he had said to himself over and over again, trying in vain to banish the haunting suspicion from his mind, for what "scrape" was it possible to associate with Nell? The very word and its loathsome suggestions made him shudder. Nell, with her beauty and her grace, with the frank sweet laugh, and her little air of thoughtful refinement—how could she have been the one to get into a "scrape," or to have had an "adventure" of such a nature as to set a painted old Jezebel giggling?

Ah, perish the thought of ill omen!

Oh, if only his mother would take her by the hand and be good to her and learn to love her, what a tower of strength she might be to him against all these disparaging aspersions and insinuations!

After Cecil had gone away, Nell went and knelt down by Lady Forrester's side, much as she had knelt there on that other memorable day long ago.

"Granny," she said, with a certain diffidence in face and manner, "I wish you hadn't said that."

"Said what? Oh, you silly little Nell, don't look so miser-

able—as if it mattered. It is an old joke between you and I—how could he understand?”

“Granny, ought I to tell him, do you think, before I marry him?”

“What! tell him that Vane Darley wanted you to run away with him? My dear, what on earth should you tell him for?”

“I thought, perhaps, I ought to. I would much rather not tell him, but ought a woman to have any secrets from her husband, do you think?”

“My dear child, if wives hadn’t got secrets from their husbands, the world would have come to an end a long time ago, for the women would all be murdered.”

“Then you think there is no occasion?”

“Certainly not. Besides, that young man wouldn’t understand—he is too innocent. The joke would seem very flat to him.”

“It wasn’t a joke, Granny; don’t call it one. It was terrible. I—I have never got over it, never been the same. It was so shameful, so degrading—and—and it half broke my heart,” she added with a little catch in her voice.

Lady Forrester glanced at her keenly. She had always been fond of Nell; there was a tender little corner in her withered old heart for her beautiful grandchild.

“I hope you are not hankering after that old sinner, Vane Darley, still, after all these years?” she said tentatively.

“Oh, no—no—ten thousand times no! It is only that he spoils so much in me—sometimes I cannot forgive him.”

“I see you still wear his present, but you are quite right to do that. Love wears out—diamonds don’t. Dottie thinks I gave it to you; she said so last time she was here, and hinted that she would like one, too. I told her she hadn’t earned it as you had!” and the old lady laughed and pinched Nell’s cheeks.

“Granny, you will never tell any one, will you?” pleaded Nell earnestly.

“Of course not. Don’t be a fool, child,” but she did not think it necessary to inform Nell how often, without mentioning her by name, she had made a good story to some old reprobate of her acquaintance out of the adventure of a sixteen-year-old grand-daughter, nor how nearly a certain Major Pryor had been one of those to listen to the recital. “As to Vane Darley,” she

went on, not desiring to pursue that side of the question any further, "he was a conquest any girl might have been proud of, let alone a baby of sixteen."

"Oh, Granny, how *can* you call it a conquest?" cried Nell indignantly and hotly.

"Well, well, don't get angry. Of course it was very wicked, and you were a little goose, but it did you no harm, and you need not trouble your head about him. You will never see him again; he hasn't been in England for years, and nobody on earth knows anything about it but me, and I shall soon be in my grave, and then nobody will know."

Then, in the moment of silence that followed, all at once there flashed back a certain scene upon Nell Forrester's memory

A crowded London terminus—the flaring gas overhead, the steam from the snorting engine, the crowd of cabs on the roadway, the porters hustling by with the luggage, and the well-known face of a woman who had looked at her full in the face blankly and sternly.

"Come along, John; there is no occasion to stop to speak to strangers."

"I wonder what has become of Mrs. Hartwood!" shot suddenly through Nell's mind with a little shudder. She went up to bed that night feeling strangely depressed and miserable. For the first time she had broken the silence of years, and had spoken of that long-ago story of her early girlhood. The very fact of having done so seemed to bring it all back to her with a startling vividness. Here, in the dull house in Wimpole Street, where time seemed to have stood still, where nothing was outwardly changed or altered—here, in the self-same tiny upper bedroom, where once she had wept out her heart, and buried her scorching cheeks in the pillows of the narrow bed, Nell Forrester could no longer treat the past as though it had been but a dream, the half-forgotten illusion of some previous existence.

For the fact remains that, although our past actions may perish, the consequences of them are too frequently immortal. The past, in short, never can be said to be dead and buried. One may live it down, blot it out, cover it up under a mountain load of years and of new experiences; one may flatter oneself that the old ghosts are laid for ever, and yet, ten to one, some day when one least expects it, they will creep out of their

graves again and confront us once more in all their pristine hideousness.

Nell Forrester had that night an innate conviction that she had not heard the last of the sin of her youth—a presentiment that she had not done with Colonel Vane Darley.

Yet, so buoyant is the human constitution, that with morning light most of these dire shadows had melted away, and when the day dawned upon which she was to dine at her future mother-in-law's house, Nell had no deeper misgivings upon her mind than those concerning the shabbiness of her evening gown, no direr forebodings than the manner in which Mrs. Roscoe would receive her.

"She will be very nice to you, I am sure," Cecil had said to her that same afternoon reassuringly. "My mother is really very soft-hearted, and once she takes to you she will be all that is kind. My aunt, Mrs. Torrens, is, I admit, rather formidable, but, after all, she has nothing to say to it—only don't let her snub you. I dislike my aunt Torrens, and I don't think she is remarkably fond of me. If she is disagreeable, don't take any notice of her."

This was not particularly encouraging. Everything seemed to depend on whether or no Mrs. Roscoe "took to her," and there, of course, Nell felt completely at sea. She was inclined to fancy that in any case she should not "take to" Mrs. Roscoe, Lady Forrester's contemptuous mention of her not having led her to cherish any very attractive expectations concerning her.

"I wish there had not been any one else dining there, Cecil."

"So do I," answered Cecil, with a slight contraction of the brow, for he knew more about it than he had ventured to tell her, "but perhaps my mother thought a little party should be given in your honour," he said, with a secret hope that Nell might, by good luck, regard the coming banquet in this light. "And—and," he went on, after half a moment's pause, with some hesitation, "you will remember, won't you, Nell dear, that—they are all very quiet decorous sort of people, my mother's friends. They are very particular, you know—I always feel myself, at her dinners, as if I must mind my p's and q's," he added with a little awkward laugh.

"And you want me to mind mine, I suppose?" said Nell

rather drily. "I quite understand. I will try not to disgrace you before them by any unseemly outburst of ill-placed hilarity."

She said it so seriously that he did not quite like it. They had been out for a walk together, and he glanced down nervously at her face, but her hat was broad and her veil so thick that he could not tell in the least whether she was annoyed, or whether she was not even secretly laughing at him.

And it was all these things put together that made the long journey in the four-wheeled cab between Wimpole Street and Rutland Gate seem just twice its normal length to Nell Forrester that same evening.

(To be continued.)

The Crusades.

By CHARLOTTE A. PRICE.

PART I.

“—Therefore, friends,
As far as to the Sepulchre of Christ.—*Shakespeare.*”

THE Western world was influenced during the greater part of the middle ages by the supposed duty of rescuing the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem from the yoke of the Infidel.

The universal feeling of veneration for the scene of our Saviour's life and death, was increased by the tendency of the time to look with piety upon everything connected with that far-off land,

“ O'er whose acres walked those blessed feet
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nail'd,
For our advantage, on the bitter cross.”

The love of that honourable reputation, which, in days of chivalry, was bestowed upon militant Christians, led many a brave warrior to seek glory, and find martyrdom, upon the distant shores of Palestine.

Richard Cœur de Lion is chiefly remarkable for his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Robert Curthose, (the eldest son of William the Conqueror); Richard Earl of Cornwall, (the brother of King Henry III.), and the gallant Edward, (afterwards King Edward I.), were all votaries of the cross.

Even after the Crusaders had been driven from Syria, and the cry of religious war was heard but at intervals in Europe, our brave monarchs, Henry IV. and Henry V., wished to re-kindle the flames of holy zeal. Many of England's noblest sons followed the banners of their respective leaders, and fell fighting against the infidels in wars more brilliant, and more impressive than any others mentioned in the chronicles of old. We know, also, that others surmounted the perils attendant on their romantic undertaking, and returned in safety to England; for, in many of our stately cathedrals and churches, we can contemplate the figures of Crusaders reposing on their sepulchral monuments. The silence and tranquillity surrounding their last sleeping-place, offers a great contrast to the din and turmoil of the battle-field, where

those doughty champions had sought, and perchance found, a short-lived renown. Yet, however mistaken may have been their ardour, who can withhold sympathy from these soldiers of Christ? Their faith and courage command our respect. Their sacrifice of country and kindred throws an air of sublime devotedness round their exploits, and forbids us to censure the madness of the enterprise.

Whether, then, we consider the Holy Wars as belonging to the general affairs of Europe, or as forming a portion of the history of our own country, they will be found equally interesting, and will appeal to the imagination of all lovers of antiquity.

After the accomplishment of prophecy in the destruction of the second temple, Paganism became the religion of Jerusalem, and the Romans dedicated to Venus and Jove the spots which had been hallowed by the sufferings of the Redeemer. But in the fourth century the banner of the cross triumphed over polytheism. Christian emperors raised churches on the ruins of heathen temples, and Jerusalem continued a seat of the true faith till the "Star of Islamism" arose, and the Arabians changed the moral and political aspect of the world. For three ages the holy city was subject in reciprocal succession to the Caliphs of Bagdad and to those of Cairo. But the commanders of the faithful in Egypt finally prevailed, and in the year 969 their rule over Palestine was established. A century, however, had not elapsed before the Turks tore Jerusalem from their grasp, but in the vicissitudes of fortune, a short time afterwards, the Egyptians once more became the victors, and recovered their power in Palestine.

In the early ages of the Church, religious curiosity prompted people to visit those places which Christ had sanctified by His presence, and Jerusalem, whether in a state of glory or abasement, was always held in veneration by Christians. St. Jerome says, that "people began to make pilgrimages to the holy city directly after the Ascension of Christ." Travellers found their sympathies stronger and their devotions more fervent, in beholding the scenes of the ministry of their Divine Master, than in simply reading the narrative of His life. Superstition readily fancied that there was some peculiar sanctity in the very ground of Jerusalem, and consequently the habit of visiting Palestine became strengthened. Even the dust of that land was adored; it was carefully conveyed

to Europe, and the fortunate possessor, whether by original acquisition or by purchase, was considered to be safe from the malevolence of demons. As a proof that miracles had not ceased in his time, St. Augustine relates a story of the cure of a young man, who had some of the dust of Jerusalem suspended in a bag over his bed. If we are devoted to any object, every circumstance, everything relating to it interests us.

Expiation was now the purpose of those whose consciences felt the burden of sins, and many underwent the pains of pilgrimage to obtain relief from guilt, and to offer up prayer in a land which, above all others, seemed to have been favoured by God. "The Bible acquainted its readers with the manners and customs of the East. A scrip and a staff were, in conformity with Asiatic customs, considered to be the accompaniments of every traveller; they were the only support of the poor, and were always carried by the rich. The village pastor delivered a staff into the hands of the pilgrim, and put round him a scarf or girdle, to which a scrip was attached. Friends and neighbours walked with him to the next town, and benedictions and tears sanctified and embittered the moment of separation. On his return, he placed the branch of the sacred palm-tree, which he had brought from Jerusalem, over the altar of his church, in proof of the accomplishment of his vow; religious thanksgivings were offered up; rustic festivity saluted and honoured him, and he was revered for his piety and successful labours."

Dante mentions the pilgrim bringing home his staff, enwreathed with palm. The word palmer denoted a traveller to Jerusalem. Some writers have said that the pilgrim travelled to some certain place; the palmer to all, and not to any one in particular. Old authors, however, do not always attend to this distinction; Chaucer, for instance, in his "Canterbury Tales," seems to consider all pilgrims to foreign parts as palmers;—and Shakespeare says:

"A true devoted pilgrim is not weary
To measure kingdoms with his feeble steps."

The palmer's dress was simple, and consistent with the gravity of his object. Palmers' weeds are frequently mentioned in old romances as a disguise, in which knights and ladies travelled. Thus in the history of King Lear—

"—We will go disguised in *palmers' weeds*,
That no man shall mistrust us what we are."

Though pilgrimages were generally considered acts of virtue, yet some of the leaders of the Church accounted them useless and criminal. Gregory, Bishop of Nice, in the fourth century, dissuades his flock from these undertakings. They were not conscientious obligations, he said, for, in the description of persons whom Christ had promised to acknowledge in the next world, the name of pilgrim could not be found. A migratory life was dangerous to virtue, particularly to the modesty of women. Malice, idolatry, poisoning and bloodshed, disgraced Jerusalem itself, and so dreadfully polluted was the city, that if any man wished to have a more than ordinary spiritual communication with Christ, he had better quit his earthly tabernacle at once, than endeavour to enjoy it in places originally sacred, but which had been since defiled. In the ninth century, a foreign bishop wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, requesting, in very earnest terms, that English women of every rank and degree might be prohibited from undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome. Their gallantries were notorious all over the continent.

The coffers of the Church, however, were enriched by the sale of relics, and the dominion of the clergy increased by the superstition of the people, therefore pilgrims continued to arrive in Palestine from various countries, and the tomb of Christ resounded with hymns in different languages. The sale of one relic in particular encouraged the ardour of pilgrimages, and from that ardour arose the Crusades.

During the fourth century, Christendom was duped into the belief that the very cross on which Christ had suffered had been discovered in Jerusalem. The city's bishop was the keeper of the treasure, but the faithful never offered their money in vain for a fragment of the holy wood. They believed the assertions of the priests, that a living virtue pervaded an inanimate and insensible substance, and that the cross permitted itself every day to be divided into several parts, and yet remained uninjured and entire. It was publicly exhibited during the religious festivals of Easter, and Jerusalem was crowded with pious strangers to witness the solemn spectacle. But after four ages of perpetual distribution, the world was filled with relics, and superstition craved for a novel object. Accordingly, the Latin clergy of Palestine pretended that on the vigil of Easter, after the great lamps in the Church of the Resurrection had been extinguished,

they were re-lighted by God Himself. People flocked from the West to the East in order to behold this act of the Divinity, and to catch some portion of a flame which had the marvellous property of healing the diseases, mental as well as bodily, of those who received it in faith.

Commerce, too, had a great deal to do with the love of pilgrimages, and the characters of a holy traveller and a worldly merchant, were often found united in the same person. The hospitals which the charitable people had founded for the weary pilgrim on the road to Jerusalem, were the resting-places of the caravans. Here the sick were nursed, and the poor relieved, and humanity was paramount over the distinctions of sects, and even no unfortunate Mahomedan supplicated at their gates in vain. According to his belief, it was as beneficial to die in Jerusalem as to die in heaven. "The prayer of a man in his house is equal to one prayer ; but in a temple near his house, it is as efficacious as twenty-five prayers ; and in a public mosque it is five hundred ; but in Jerusalem or Medina it is worth five thousand common orisons."

But nothing affected the popular mind more than the opinion which distinguished the tenth century, that the reign of Anti-Christ was at hand. From every quarter of the Latin world the poor affrighted Christians, deserting their homes and ordinary occupations, crowded to the Holy Land. The belief was general, that on the place of His former sufferings, Christ would judge the world, and though years passed by, and nature held her appointed course, yet Jerusalem became dearer than ever to the pilgrims, because it had been the scene of the pains and austerities which the monks imposed on them, and the subject of their reflections and feelings.

Most of the causes of pilgrimages arrived, in the eleventh century, at the height of their influence and effect. The history of that period abounds with narratives of devotional expeditions. England, Germany and Italy all contributed bands of devotees willing to journey to Jerusalem, and a church was built there and dedicated to the Virgin, where they could celebrate religious services, according to the Latin ritual. The feelings of these strangers are well expressed by one of them, who declared that Jesus Christ alone knew the number of prayers which they offered up, the tears which they shed, and the sighs which they breathed.

Under the rules of the Moslems, the state of the resident

pilgrims in the Holy Land was that of sunshine and storms. The Koran considered its foes as the enemies of God, and they consequently hated and oppressed the Christians. Conversion or tribute was the choice offered to them. Two pieces of gold was the annual price of the safety of every individual infidel in Jerusalem. A Patriarch and an episcopal establishment of clergy were permitted, and the congregation of the tributaries lived in the quarter of the city where the Church of the Resurrection stood. Their condition was not much above that of slaves; the smallness of their houses and the meanness of their dress marked their degradation; they were persecuted and despised.

The state of the Christians increased in misery under the Fatimite Caliphs. Hakem, the third prince, passed all former limits of cruelty. He called himself the personal image of God, and his audacity awed several thousand people into a belief in his claims. At his command the Church of the Resurrection and the rock of the Sepulchre were greatly injured, but with the versatility of unprincipled passion he ordered, before his death, that the church should be restored. His successors, however, imitated his example, and despised his command. All religious ceremonies and processions were prohibited. Property was insecure; children were torn from their parents; the daughters were led to prostitution, the sons to apostacy. But the fortitude of the Christians triumphed, and with the pecuniary aid of the Greek Emperor, they restored the edifice which commemorated the most wonderful passage in their Redeemer's life. This work was accomplished amidst a thousand dangers.

In the next century the public mind of Europe was persuaded by Pope Gregory VII. that a war with the Turks was both virtuous and necessary. Their unparalleled barbarities were heard of with indignation, and every year the desire of revenge gained force in the breasts of the Latins. The bloodthirstiness of the lords of the holy city was only checked by their avarice. To prohibit the Christians from pilgrimages and commerce would have proved a serious loss to the revenues of the state; but the Turks considerably increased the capitation tax, and as their cruelties made holy journeys more meritorious, the number of pilgrims suffered no diminution. The wealthy stranger was immediately and violently robbed. Though the simple palmer was the emblem of religious poverty, yet as the Turks could not

appreciate the force and self-denial of his pious fervour, they thought it was impossible that any one could have undertaken so long a journey without possessing a large pecuniary viaticum. Unrestrained by humanity in the rigour of their search, they ripped open the bodies of their victims, or awaited the slower consequences of an emetic of scammony water.

Continental Europe was divided among an armed aristocracy; the sword encouraged and decided disputes; no one would acquire by labour what he could gain by blood; martial excellence was the point of ambition, for it was the sole road to distinction, the only test of merit. The Christians thought that conquest was the surest proof of Divine approbation, and that heaven would never sanction the actions of the wicked. The feudal law was, in the eleventh century, a mere military code—a system of provisions of attack and defence; the voice of religion was seldom heard amid the din of arms; and fierceness, violence, and rapine prevailed in the absence of social order and morals. Private war desolated Europe, the nobles were robbers, and most castles were but dens of thieves and receptacles of plunder. Churchmen as well as laymen held their estates by the return of military service. They often accompanied their armed vassals, with the lord, in his warlike expeditions; and it would have been remarkable, if, at all times, the only office which they performed was that of encouraging the soldiers to battle. As the clergy were taken from the people at large, it was natural that they should, on many points, possess popular feelings and manners. They partook therefore of the violent character of the age. Some made robbery a profession, and the voice even of the wisest among them would not have been listened to in national assemblies, if they had not been clad in armour. Yet the clergy did much towards accustoming mankind to prefer the authority of law to the power of the sword. At their instigation private wars ceased for certain periods, and on particular days, and the observance of the *Truce of God* was guarded by the terrors of excommunication and anathema.

Christianity could not immediately and directly change the face of the world; but it mitigated the horrors of the times by infusing itself into warlike institutions. "As the investiture of the toga was the first honour conferred on the Roman youth, so the Germans were incited to ideas of personal consequence, by

receiving from their lord, their father, or some near relation, in a general assembly, a lance and a shield. Each petty prince was surrounded by many valiant young men, who formed his ornament in peace, his defence in war. When the tribes of the north had renounced idolatry, and adopted the religion of the south, the ceremony of creating a soldier became changed from the delivery of a lance and shield to the girding of a sword on the candidate; the Church called upon him always to protect her, and Christian morality added the obligations of rescuing the oppressed, and preserving peace. A barrier was thus raised against cruelty and injustice; and objects of desire, distinct from rapine and plunder, were before the eyes of martial youth. The true knight was courteous and humane, stern and ferocious. As protector of the weak his mind was elevated and softened, generous and disinterested. But the enemies of the Church, as well as the foes of morals, were the objects of his hatred; he became the judge of opinions as well as of actions, and military spirit prompted him to destroy rather than to convert infidels and heretics. The engrafting of the virtues of humanity, and the practical duties of religion, on the sanguinary qualities of the warrior, was a circumstance beneficial to the world. But the mixture of the apostle and the soldier was an union which reason abhors. It gave rise to a feeling of violent animosity against the Saracens, and was a strong and active cause of the Crusades."

Peter the Hermit, a native of Amiens, in France, was the first man who kindled that false and fatal zeal which for two centuries spread its devastating and consuming fires. In his youth, Peter fought under the banners of Eustace de Bouillon, but he did not long aspire after military honour. He became a priest and an anchorite, and since in his subsequent life he was usually clad in the dress of a solitary, his contemporaries surnamed him the Hermit. As the last means of expiating some errors of his early days, he resolved to undertake a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His small and mean person was macerated by austerities; his face was thin and careworn; but his eyes spoke thought and feeling, and atoned for the general insignificance of his appearance. He fancied himself invested with Divine authority, and what in truth was but the vision of a heated imagination, he believed to be a communication from heaven.

He accomplished his journey in safety, and was so overcome with the sight of the wretchedness of the Christians in Jerusalem, that he said to his host, the Patriarch Simeon, "As a penance for my sins I will travel over Europe, and describe to princes and people the degraded state of the Church, and will urge them to repair it." He accordingly returned to Europe, and laid the case before Pope Urban II., who eagerly listened to his tale, and resolved to direct the martial energy of Europe towards rescuing the Holy Land from its enemies. Peter, also, devoted to his object, preached the deliverance of the Sepulchre. He traversed Italy and France for that purpose. His dress consisted of a coarse woollen shirt and a hermit's mantle. He distributed among the poor those gifts which gratitude showered upon himself; he reclaimed the sinner; terminated disputes, and sowed the germs of virtue. He was everywhere received with respect as the man of God, and even the hairs which fell from his mule were treasured by the people as relics. His exhortations to vengeance on the Turks were heard with rapture, because they reflected the religious sentiments of the day. The love also of romantic adventure, and the desire for danger, sympathized with the advice of the preacher. Religion and heroism were in unison.

In order to rouse and concentrate the mighty powers of holy zeal, Pope Urban assembled two councils of clergy and laymen; one in Italy, the seat of his influence, and the other in France, whither he had been invited by Raymond, Count of Toulouse, and the Bishop of Chorges. France, too, was the most military country of the West, and had often acquired fame in sacred wars.

The Council of Clermont took place in 1095, and individuals from every class of laymen, and every rank of the ecclesiastical order, flocked to Clermont from all parts of France and Germany; and the deliberations were carried on in an open square, for no hall could contain the unprecedented multitude. Seven days were spent in making decrees on matters of local and temporary interest, and in laying down laws for the edification of manners. The greatest subject was reserved for the eighth day of the sitting of the council. The Pope then ascended the pulpit, and exhorted his anxious auditors to make war on the enemies of God. This celebrated oration is very interesting. The following sentences are extracts from it:—"You have

exasperated the long-suffering of God, my dearest brethren, by too lightly regarding His forbearance. . . . To you, however, a secure haven of rest is offered, unless you neglect it. A station of perpetual safety will be awarded you, for the exertion of a trifling labour against the Turks. Compare, now, the labours which you undertook in the practice of wickedness, and those which you will encounter in the undertaking I advise. . . . The cause of these labours will be charity ; if, thus warned by the command of God, you lay down your lives for the brethren, the wages of charity will be the grace of God ; the grace of God is followed by eternal life. Go then prosperously ; go then with confidence to attack the enemies of God . . . they usurp even the Sepulchre of our Lord, that singular assurance of faith ; and sell to our pilgrims admission to that city, which ought, had they a trace of their ancient courage left, to be open to Christians only. This alone might be enough to cloud our brows ; but now, who, except the most abandoned, or the most envious of Christian reputation, can endure that we do not divide the world equally with them ? . . . You are a nation born in the most temperate regions of the world ; who may be both prodigal of blood, in defiance of death and wounds ; and are not deficient in prudence. . . . You will be extolled throughout all ages, if you rescue your brethren from danger. To those present, in God's name, I command this ; to the absent I enjoin it. Let such as are going to fight for Christianity, put the form of the cross upon their garments, that they may, outwardly, demonstrate the love arising from their inward faith ; enjoying by the gift of God, and the privilege of St. Peter, absolution from all their crimes ; let this in the meantime soothe the labours of their journey ; satisfied that they shall obtain, after death, the advantages of a blessed martyrdom. . . . Place then before your minds, if you shall be made captive, torments and chains ; nay, every possible suffering that can be inflicted. Expect, for the firmness of your faith, even horrible punishments, that so, if it be necessary, you may redeem your souls at the expense of your bodies. . . . Know you not 'that for men to live is wretchedness, and happiness to die ?' This doctrine, if you remember, you imbibed with your mother's milk, through the preaching of the clergy ; and this doctrine your ancestors, the martyrs, held out by their example. Death sets free from its filthy prison the human soul, which then takes

flight for the mansions fitted for its virtues. . . . Rid God's sanctuary of the wicked; expel the robbers; bring in the pious. Let no love of relations detain you; for man's chiefest love is towards God. Let no attachment to your native soil be an impediment; because, in different points of view, all the world is exile to the Christian, and all the world his country. . . . Those who may die will enter the mansions of heaven, while the living shall behold the Sepulchre of the Lord. . . . When you attack the enemy let the words resound from every side, *Deus vult! Deus vult!* Let every one mark on his breast or back the sign of our Lord's cross, in order that the saying may be fulfilled, 'he who takes up the cross and follows Me is worthy of Me.'

Tears, groans, and acclamations of assent and applause were the answers of the Christian multitude, who knelt, while Cardinal Gregory poured forth in their name a general confession of sins. Every one smote his breast in sorrow, and the Pope, stretching forth his hands, absolved and blessed them.

"*Deus Vult*" continued to be for some time the war cry of the first Crusaders, and, during the siege of Jerusalem, it received the additional words, "*Adjuva Deus.*" All nations in all ages have used particular words for the excitement of martial ardour. In an army, therefore, there were as many cries of war as there were banners. There was a general cry, also, which was usually the name of the commander, or the cry of the king.

Adhemar, Bishop of Puy, was the first person who solicited a cross from the Pope. One of red cloth was affixed to his right shoulder; and immediately several laymen were invested with the sign of their new character. This was in imitation of Christ, who carried a cross on His shoulders to the place of execution. The cross was generally worn on the right shoulder, or on the upper part of the back; it was also frequently placed on the top of the arm. Red was, for a long while, even till the time of Richard I., King of England, the general colour of this cross. The materials of the cross were silk, or gold, or cloth; and the most frenzied of the Crusaders cut the holy sign on the flesh itself.

Pope Urban had not the personal daring of his illustrious predecessor, Gregory VII., therefore he deputed Adhemar to lead the soldiers of Christ to the Holy Sepulchre. "Man fully responded to the supposed calls of God: Persons of every age, rank, and degree, assumed the cross. The prohibition of women

from undertaking the journey was passed over in contemptuous silence. They separated themselves from their husbands, where men wanted faith, or resolved to follow them with their helpless infants. Monks, not waiting for the permission of their superiors, threw aside their black mourning gowns, and issued from their cloisters full of the spirit of holy warriors. Murderers, adulterers, robbers, and pirates, quitted their iniquitous pursuits, and declared that they would wash away their sins in the blood of the infidel. In short, thousands and millions of armed saints and sinners ranged themselves to fight the battles of the Lord. For some months nothing was heard through Europe but the note of preparation for war. Men of all ranks and degrees purchased horses and arms. In some instances the poor rustic shod his oxen like horses, and placed his family in a cart, where it was amusing to hear the children, on the approach to any large town or castle, inquiring if that were Jerusalem."

In the spring of the year 1096, the masses of European population began to roll. Fathers led their sons to the place of meeting; women blessed the moment of separation from their husbands; or, if they lamented, it was because they were not permitted to share the honours and perils of the expedition.

The first body of the champions of the cross was led by Walter, a gentleman of Burgundy, whose cognomen was "The Pennyless." The people swept along from France to Hungary. But the flame of piety had not spread into Bulgaria, and when they reached that country, the inhabitants turned their arms against the unfriendly people. The din of battle sounded through the land, and the Crusaders were slain by thousands. Forty thousand men, women and children of all nations followed Peter the Hermit in the route taken by Walter. On their arrival in Hungary, they were so enraged by the sight of the arms and crosses of their precursors on the battlements of Malleville, that their revenge was kindled, a battle ensued, in which seven thousand Hungarians were slain, and the Crusaders gave themselves up to every kind of cruelty and excess. After various engagements between the two contending parties, in which massacre and plundering were conspicuous, the associates of the Hermit united themselves to Walter's army. Intelligence of their disorders flew to Constantinople, and the Emperor commanded them to hasten to the south. Seeing their unfitnes

for war, he ordered them to remain in Greece till the arrival of the armies. He supplied them with quarters, money, and provisions; but they requited his kindness by deeds of flagitiousness on his people. They plundered palaces and churches, and no consideration could make the wretches observe peace and good order. Peter lost all authority over them. Their crimes were enormous. They quitted their comrades, and carried their ravages into Bithynia, where, like rivers which had overflowed their banks, they and the Turks rushed together and fought fiercely on the plain which surrounds the city of Nicæa. The number of wounds with which Walter fell, attested the vigour of resistance; most of his followers were slain. The cruel and sensual Turks pressed on to the camp, sacrificed the priests on Christian altars, and reserved for the seraglio such of the women who were beautiful. The fierce soldiers of Asia gratified their savage instincts by collecting the bones of the fallen. A lofty hill was made of them, and it remained for many years, a dreadful warning to succeeding bands of Crusaders.

Before Europe glittered with the pomp and splendour of chivalry, another herd of wild savages devastated the world. They came from England, France and Flanders, and were called the goat and goose mob, because they believed the Divine Spirit had entered into these two creatures. They committed unheard-of cruelties on the German Jews, and the ruin of the Hungarian nation appeared inevitable when these miscreants entered Hungary to the number of two hundred thousand. They forced a bridge over the Danube, but by some strange panic, which the best historians can neither explain nor describe, they deserted in swarms and fled. Their cowardice was as abject as their boldness had been ferocious, and the Hungarians pursued them with such slaughter, that the waters of the Danube were red with their blood for many days. Some few of the rabble escaped, and in time joined the regular forces of the feudal princes of Europe.

More than a quarter of a million of wretched fanatics perished in the first convulsion of enthusiasm, and yet the banners of the infidel still floated on the walls of Jerusalem. But different scenes are now to be enacted before our eyes. Courage in various forms, wisdom, prudence, and skill in endless variety, appear in the characters and conduct of the renowned leaders

of the first Crusade. The chief of these was Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Brabant, or Lower Lorraine, on whom nature had bestowed her choicest gifts. His understanding was enriched with such knowledge and learning as his times possessed. He was alike distinguished for political courage and for personal bravery; and his zeal in the cause of heaven was always directed by prudence, and tempered by philanthropy. His brother Baldwin, and many other knights high in fame, marched under his standard.

While Godfrey was leading the armies of Lorraine and Germany through the Hungarian marshes, Hugh, Count of Vermandois, and brother of the French king, was calling to his side the armed pilgrims from England, Flanders, and the middle and north of France. The knights who marched with him were as numerous as the Grecian warriors at the siege of Troy. Stephen, Count of Blois, Robert, Count of Flanders, Robert, Duke of Normandy and the celebrated Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, were among the number. They marched through Italy, and received the standard of St. Peter from Pope Urban at Lucca. The whole expedition seemed, by the magnificence of its equipments, to be destined for pleasure rather than war, and the Count of Vermandois sent twenty-four knights arrayed in golden armour, to request the Emperor Alexius to make splendid preparations for his reception.

When Alexius heard of the greatness of the European armament, and that his old enemy, Bohemond, Prince of Tarentum, had assumed the cross, he became suspicious, and his mind vacillated between the wish to destroy, and the dread of offending his allies. He therefore received Hugh with honours, and entertained him splendidly, and by flattery and presents, so won his affection, that he obtained from him an acknowledgment of fidelity.

Godfrey heard with indignation that the emperor treated the brother of the King of France as a captive, and demanded his immediate release. But Alexius persisted in his course; therefore Godfrey ordered his soldiers to ravage the beautiful plains of Thrace. The distress of the people was soon reported to Constantinople, and Alexius repented of his perfidy. Godfrey then restored the army to its discipline, took the road for Constantinople, and arrived in its neighbourhood two days before Christmas. Fresh acts of hostility on the part of the emperor led to war

between the Greeks and Crusaders, and though Godfrey had no machines wherewith to batter the walls of Constantinople, yet the impetuous valour of his soldiers was dreadfully destructive. The Greeks from the towers shot arrows and hurled darts ; the coats of mail protected the Crusaders, but many of the unbarbed horses were killed. Alexius was compelled by the distress of his people to sue for mercy, and the brother of the King of France did not disdain to become the advocate of the faithless Greek.

After many alternations of peace and war, Godfrey consented for the sake of his army to do homage to the Emperor. Alexius sent his son into the Latin camp as a hostage, and Godfrey, with his friends, entered Constantinople. They were dressed with all the magnificence of the soldiers of that age. The coat of arms, or mantle over the armour, was the splendid part of a warrior's dress. It was made of cloth of gold or silver, of rich skins, furs of ermine, or sables, &c. All the splendour of the Byzantine court was also assumed, in order to overawe the stranger. Godfrey bent the knee before the throne, and kissed the knees or the feet of the Emperor. Alexius then adopted him as his son, and clothed him with imperial robes. He promised to aid the cause with troops, stores of arms, and provisions ; while the Duke of Lorraine swore to deliver to Alexius such Grecian places as he should recapture from the Turks.

One of the most disinterested and devoted followers of the cross, who joined in this Crusade, was Tancred, son of Odo the Good. His character shines with a pure and holy lustre amid the self-seeking and barbarities with which he was surrounded, and he would have been courteous and humane to all mankind, if the superstition of his age had not taught him that the Saracens were the enemies of God, and that the Christians were the ministers of heavenly wrath.

Just considerations of policy, or the necessity of circumstances, had induced Godfrey and Hugh to take the oath of fealty to Alexius, but neither religion nor honour swayed the mind of Bohemond ; ambition and avarice were the ruling passions of his soul. Tancred escaped the disgrace of acknowledging a foreign prince to be his liege lord by disguising himself as a common soldier, and thus crossed the Bosphorus unnoticed.

Judge Not.

IN TWO PARTS.

By MRS. BOYSE,

Author of "THAT MOST DISTRESSFUL COUNTRY," etc.

PART I.

IT was midsummer, the sunniest time of the year, and Pomeroy Manor House could hardly be seen for the masses of roses, crimson, yellow, white and shell-pink, which hung about its windows, clustered on the wide verandah, and even boldly aspired to the many-gabled roof, and threw their long branches about the chimneys.

The old home of the Pomeroy family was of no particular style of architecture, but with its lichen-tinted red roof and many picturesque angles, gables and twisted chimney stacks, delighted the heart of every painter who beheld it, fitly framed as it was by splendid cedars, and surrounded by lawns soft as velvet and a wealth of gay flowers.

Inside it was a house of many cosy nooks, deep window seats, broad oaken staircases and sunny rooms.

The furniture like itself was of no marked period ; there were rare and beautiful heirlooms, the pride of many generations of owners, and other things valued only from old association ; and beside these relics of the past, there were plenty of modern additions and appliances, so that few more thoroughly charming and home-like houses existed in the kingdom.

Under the tallest cedar tree a lady sat knitting ; she had been very lovely in her youth, with the beauty of delicate, refined features and sweetness of expression, and, though middle-aged, retained much of her beauty, and only those who knew her well noticed anything amiss with the soft dark eyes which were slowly losing their sight.

Mrs. Pomeroy knitted on busily ; the sunny silence was only broken by the cooing of many pigeons and the twitter of birds in the bushes, or the distant sounds from the rookery, till the sun sank low and the shadows lengthened.

Then an old butler and a lad came out to collect stray books

or papers from the verandah, and his voice was heard from the dining-room afterwards, as he busied himself in superintending the arrangement of a most tempting supper.

Piles of splendid fruit and quaint silver bowls of rich cream, scarlet lobsters imbedded in crisp lettuce, dainty cakes and rolls, junkets and other Devonshire luxuries covered the table, though space was left for hot dishes, and on the black oak sideboard spiced beef and other solid dishes were placed in front of many curious old salvers and cups.

Presently a stout, middle-aged maid came out to gather moss-rose buds and forget-me-nots. These were arranged on the table ; and when her task was completed the maid returned to talk to her mistress with the freedom of an old trusted retainer, for indeed she had lived in the Pomeroy family for the greater part of her life.

"They must soon come now, ma'am," she said ; "and you must give them a welcome at the gate, or the master and my dear lamb will be quite damped ; and just as Master Dick's home, too, and he worshipping the ground her pretty feet dance over."

"Certainly I will be at the gate, Jael," said Mrs. Pomeroy with a sad smile. "I may never see the hay come home again, you know."

"Ah, ma'am, my dear, darling mistress. Don't now, don't. God is above us all, and your sweet eyes can't be darkened for ever."

Jael's own overflowed ; but just then a lively sound of music and voices became audible, and Jael led Mrs. Pomeroy carefully over the grass to a side gate opening on to a typical Devonshire lane, where ferns grew in profusion, and honeysuckles and wild roses hung in rich clusters, and far away the blue gleaming sea was visible across the purple moorland.

Up the lane from the hay meadows came a gay procession of merry, sun-burnt haymakers, headed by various village musicians, playing vigorously in accompaniment to the quaint old song which their companions were singing loudly, but in fair time and tune. Several waggons heaped high with fragrant hay followed, with laughing girls and children riding on them, and waving bunches of wild flowers and gaudy cotton handkerchiefs or ribbons. Last of all was a smartly painted waggon drawn by four splendid grey horses, the pride of Squire Pomeroy's heart, with manes and tails deftly decked by many parti-coloured streamers ; the brass on their harness gleamed bright as gold, and they tossed their

heads and stepped proudly in time to the bells they wore. Their load was wreathed with foxgloves, kingcups and other field flowers, and on it rode one girl only, but a very vision of fresh young beauty.

Tall, queenly, with masses of unbound auburn hair rippling far below her waist, and crowned with roses; in her hand she carried a rose-decked pole, as if it were a sceptre, from which floated broad ribbons; her flowing white dress was garlanded carelessly but effectively with more roses, and her rich colouring and great laughing dark eyes made her a radiant embodiment of happy, careless, splendid girlhood; a true summer queen, who looked as if sorrow could never mar her brilliancy. Two men walked by her rustic carriage with their eyes fixed on her, and fond passionate love in their hearts; but the one, though still upright and fresh coloured, was the father from whom she had inherited the proverbial beauty of his race; the other, young, strong, broad-shouldered and manly, had been the playfellow of her childhood, and now worshipped her with the passion of youth and first love. The little procession paused, the song was sung merrily to its end, and then ringing cheers followed for Squire Pomeroy and the mistress, and for Miss Lilian. "God bless them all, and grant them many such another haymaking, with the handsomest lady in the country for the hay queen, and a good husband to her;" and here, with a half-sly smile, a cheer was demanded for "Master Dick," whose soldierly coolness could not prevent the colour rising in his bronzed cheeks, as he bowed his thanks.

And then the queen descended from her throne and ran off to the house; the haymakers moved on to the great stackyard, where a substantial supper awaited them, with mighty jugs of home-brewed ale and sparkling cool cider, and a large barn was gay with flags and evergreens for a dance later on; while in the house Lilian, with her rich masses of hair curling about her forehead and coiled round her shapely head, presided over the meal, as her mother could no longer head the table, but had to be tenderly waited on by her husband and only child.

Lilian had put on a soft, creamy silk which showed her rounded arms and stately white throat through ruffles of old lace; a dress which her mother had devised specially to suit her darling's unusual type of beauty, and which became her so

well that Dick Trevelyan could not take his eyes from her, and his glances made her lower her long lashes, and brought the colour to her cheeks, though she laughed and joked with the merry spirit of a girl who had passed her eighteen years of life as it were one long summer's day, and was the beloved and spoilt pet of all around her. Other children had been born to her parents, but they were dead, and on Lilian they centred their love and pride, and she returned it with full measure. Happy in their affection and in the home of her life, she had never sighed for change or found the somewhat lonely manor house dull, though occasionally the fancy came to her that she would like a glimpse of great cities, when as to-night Dick Trevelyan began to describe some new and gorgeous play that he had seen.

Mrs. Pomeroy listened and said gently, "I never entered a theatre, Dick, and would not like to."

"The mother fancies them wicked," said the squire with a smile, "and thinks actors and actresses a bad lot."

"No, no, dear!" returned his wife with some warmth. "God forbid that I should judge so hardly; but it is a life of terrible temptation and trial, and it wrings my heart to think of the poor girls forced into it, and their mothers, whose thoughts must be one long agony of anxiety for their daughter's souls."

Her tender unworldliness of thought and speech touched both men, and they forbore to say anything that might vex her; for she was of those rare natures that grieve for all sin and sorrow as if it touched her nearly.

The warm flower-scented summer darkness stole on the manor, the weary haymakers tired of their gaieties were sleeping soundly, and under the cedar tree the squire sat holding his wife's hand fondly.

"Mary, my dearest wife, she is our only one, and it is hard to feel that we must spare her, but Dick is one of a thousand, and they love each other as we did—no, as we do, my own Mary."

And drawing her head on his shoulder, the husband, who after long years was still a lover, let his wife shed the tears that came unbidden, in his arms.

At the wicket gate stood Dick Trevelyan, at last able to clasp the girl he almost worshipped to his breast, and print fond passionate kisses on her lovely upturned face at will.

"My queen, my heart's darling, my lovely pearl, say you love me just a little," he murmured, as he gathered the unresisting Lilian yet closer to him, and felt her heart beating against his own.

For all answer, half shyly, half fondly, she held up her lips like a child, and then, startled by his passionate response, whispered: "I do love you, Dick, as I could never love any one else."

The golden summer moon was rising behind the moor, the sea caught its light in a thousand ripples, and all forgetful of time the lovers whispered heart to heart, and happy as only those can be who are in the first enchanted moments of love, deep, passionate and all-sufficing.

Suddenly dark shadows fell on them, and from the far-away sea came a low, mournful, dreary sound. Lilian shivered, even in Dick's fond protecting clasp.

"The Bar is moaning," she whispered. "Oh, Dick, it is a bad omen."

"Nonsense, my pet," he said, hastily. "It means change of wind, that's all. I must take you in, my darling. Those clouds threaten rain, and you are cold."

* * * * *

September freshness was in the air, and scarlet Virginia creeper wreaths had replaced the roses, as three months later Lilian stood again at the wicket gate merrily scolding the dogs who were struggling for notice around her.

A horn sounding in the lane announced the arrival of the postman, and, as the apple-faced, white-haired old man came ambling along on his fat pony, he chuckled knowingly and handed the postbag with a sly remark of:

"You do be in haste for letters now-a-days, miss."

Lilian did not linger, but raced off liked a hare to fetch the key, her dogs barking madly as they followed.

It took but a few moments to open the bag, select the well-known letter with its Aldershot postmark, and run back to the cedar tree seat to enjoy it.

Suddenly as she read her face grew pale, and with an exclamation she turned back to the first page as if in hopes that she had misread it, but in vain, and with flowing tears she sobbed out:

"It can't be true. Dick, my Dick, ordered out to the Indian

frontier where they are fighting, and going at once. Oh, what shall I do? How can I bear to think of it? I may never, never see him again."

The letter was a brief one, written in haste, to explain that owing to some of the officers of another battalion being killed in a hill fight, Dick had to go immediately and would come to say good-bye only for a few hours.

With the letter in her hand, Lilian crossed the lawn to seek comfort at her father's hands. As she neared the house, through the open study window she saw him just entered from an early tramp after partridges, and opening his letters, a couple of handsome setters at his side watching him with fond brown eyes.

Lilian paused a minute, struggling to master her sobs and dry her tears. All of a sudden her very blood was frozen by an awful cry, not loud, but as of a strong man despairing of help in his mortal agony.

She saw her father stagger as if he had received a death blow, and fall to the ground. Juno, the brown setter, uttered a long-drawn howl, and flew to meet Lilian as if to call for aid.

With the strength of fear and excitement Lilian rushed to her father's side, and raised him in her strong young arms to a couch.

He was not quite insensible, but gasped in hollow whispers:

"Ruined—ruined—the bank—all gone. My poor Mary—and you—God help you both. It's my death blow, and His curse on those damned swindlers."

His head sank as if death had indeed come on him, and Lilian, snatching the bell-rope, rang peal after peal, till all the startled servants came in haste to her aid.

The weary hours passed leaden-footed, the sun sank in imperial splendour of purple and gold behind the yellow stubble fields, to be succeeded by a brilliant harvest moon; and as she in her turn passed from her brief reign, and the first tender blush-rose tints of dawn woke the birds to blithe chirping and life, the watchers by Squire Pomeroy's bed saw a change pass over his face, and his eyes opened once more, as he stretched out his hand. Lilian, in her ignorance, fancied he was recovering, but Jael, with tear-brimming eyes and quivering lips, took her mistress's hand and laid it in the squire's.

He was past speech, but, answering the mute appeal of his eyes, the faithful servant said hastily:

"Kiss him, Miss Lilian, honey ; kiss him quickly."

Lilian, trembling and awe-stricken, obeyed mechanically, and, with a momentary return of strength, her father drew his wife's head once more down on his breast, and, encircling her with his arm, tried to take Lilian's hand ; but, failing, gazed with piteous entreaty at his child, and then at the mother, who was clinging to him in silent agony of prayer and sorrow.

As if by instinct Lilian felt what he would say, and, drawing up her strong, lithe form, answered clearly and firmly :

"Father, I swear to you that at any cost to myself I will shield my darling and yours from suffering, so help me God, or——"

Her words were frozen on her lips, for her father's chest heaved with an awful struggle for breath. Jael hastened to raise him, the doctor came from the next room, and when the labourers obeyed the sound of the farm bell they came with bent heads and hushed voices, for another and a deeper-toned bell was tolling slowly and mournfully in the old church tower. Squire Pomeroy was taken to his rest, not in the fulness of time and peacefully, but struck down as by the hand of a murderer, with bitterness in his heart to the last against those who had robbed him of his all.

* * * * *

Only a week later, and sunlight was once more shining into the study windows, and the dogs lay idly on the lawn, starting up now and then to listen for the step and whistle they had loved so well.

Upstairs Mrs. Pomeroy lay on a couch, with the sunbeams she would never see again playing about her ; the long, passionate weeping had sealed her fate, and the light was gone from her eyes for ever.

In her father's study chair the daughter he had shielded from the most trifling vexations sat ; a short, brisk, elderly man by her side, sorting papers. Already she had taken on herself all the cares and responsibilities of the situation.

Her plain, heavy black dress made her look older. The rich auburn hair was brushed from her white face, the soft, rosy lips set in hard, determined lines, and the great dark eyes no longer gleamed with girlish fun and spirits, but had in them the steadfast light of strong will and steady purpose, as she listened to the measured tones of the lawyer who was her companion.

"In short, we are beggars," she said quietly, as he paused for her to speak.

The lawyer, though hardened to seeing trouble, was human, and his heart ached as he replied :

"Miss Pomeroy, have you no friends nor relations to help you?"

"No," she said curtly. "At least, my father has—had, I mean—one step-sister. She did not like him. Her name is Midding Stoney."

"Mrs. Midding Stoney? The pillar of good works and charitable societies. Oh, the very woman to help—at least, I hope so," said the lawyer, who knew mankind, and believed not too much in it.

"The manor must go, I suppose," said Lilian sadly, looking out on the lovely garden and the far-away blue hills. "Well, take this Bristol man's offer. What does it matter, Mr. Morris?"

"It is not for you to decide, Miss Pomeroy," replied the lawyer kindly, "nor even for your mother. Do you not understand that the bank shareholders took on themselves unlimited liability? It ran well for years, and your father believed in it so implicitly that his whole capital was in it, and instead of a settlement on your mother he provided for her by will, leaving you the rest."

The lawyer spoke gently of the dead man, but being himself inoculated with the wisdom of the serpent, he cursed the honest and unwise faith in human nature, which had left these innocent women in such a hopeless plight.

"I quite understand now," replied Lilian in the same firm voice in which she had answered all along. Her companion mentally noted it and knew her for a character of unusual strength, and summing up her rare physical beauties as coolly as if he were inventorying goods and chattels, he thought regretfully that it was a pity she could not be shown to advantage in the matrimonial market of the modern Babylon, but all he said was :

"And Mr. Trevelyan, Miss Pomeroy? do I understand you are going to marry shortly?"

Lilian's white face flushed and her beautiful eyes softened wonderfully as she said quickly :

"Not yet—no. Mr. Trevelyan was ordered unexpectedly to India. He started yesterday."

Her fingers closed tightly on her engagement ring, a sad smile

came to her lips as she thought of the parting, and of Dick's fond assurances that her losses had but endeared her the more to him.

"A son of General Trevelyan's and Lady Matilda's, I think," said the lawyer.

"Yes, they were old friends of father's, and Dick—Mr. Trevelyan—used to spend his holidays here when they were in India, but I had not seen him for nearly five years when he came back," replied Lilian, "and the general and Lady Matilda were so kind about it, Mr. Morris."

Mr. Morris began to feel himself painfully human, not half so stoical as he believed, as he listened to the innocent talk of this child, at once so brave and self-reliant, and so ignorant of the ways of the world, that she did not know that the heiress of Pomeroy Manor and £3,000 a year, at least, would have been a prize for any younger son of a very moderately-endowed general, even without her rare beauty.

Lilian went on after a pause. "General Trevelyan is coming here at noon, I heard this morning. He did not say why, and Dick knew nothing of it, or he would have told me. Perhaps, Mr. Morris, he wants to help dear mother; and I fancied that if he would let her have just a tiny little cottage on his property, with Jael, my old nurse, to take care of her, that I could get some work—teaching children or something."

"Perhaps that is the general's mission; we shall soon know," said Mr. Morris gently, but averting his face as he spoke, and realising the annoying fact that he had a vulnerable spot somewhere in his heart yet more acutely; for he saw that the sword hung over the unconscious victim's head, and he knew General Trevelyan, who had done many things which the public thought heroic, but was unbeloved of his regiment down to the smallest drummer boy.

Punctually to the hour named, the general's fly drove up to the door, and he emerged—a tall, thin, iron-grey man; hair, eyes and clothes alike of a cold-grey shade; features sharp cut, lips a mere hard, narrow line.

The presence of Mr. Morris seemed welcome to this veteran. He requested Lilian to leave the room while he interviewed the lawyer.

With her eyes yet mercifully love-blinded, Lilian ran to her mother to pet and coax her, with every loving word and caress

that she could devise. The two seemed to have changed places, and the mother, once so firm and wise, though fond, now leant on the child that but a brief while before she hardly could believe was not still her baby, her youngest born and only remaining treasure.

The two men in the study were interchanging brief, dry sentences, but their tempers were rising, opposition being distasteful to both equally.

"As a man of the world; sir, I should never have expected you to argue in favour of romantic folly," said the one. "My son must marry money; I can give him none."

"Better say you will give him none," replied the other coolly.

"I do say so," exclaimed the soldier with an oath.

"And I say, general, that the girl is one in ten thousand, and your son will be dishonoured if you force him to break his word to her."

"She will take the initiative," said the general with a pitiless look in his keen eyes. "As her family lawyer you would do well to soften the necessity; if left to me, I go straight to the point, as is my custom."

"I may be a lawyer, but I am neither a butcher of lambs, nor a torturer of women," returned Mr. Morris in steady, bitter tones, with eyes fixed on the general.

"What do you mean, sir?" thundered the latter, livid with rage.

"Mean? I mean just what I say," said the lawyer defiantly. "If my words bear any other interpretation to you, I cannot help it. I shall not interfere between you and Miss Pomeroy; perhaps it is more merciful to strike home at once, and there is no information to be extracted in this case by prolonged pain, either mental or *physical*; she has neither secrets nor *fugitives* to hide. Good morning."

And, with a quick movement, Mr. Morris slipped through the door, just as a massive brass paper weight was hurled at him with the full force of a man maddened with fury.

"I grow an ass," thought Mr. Morris, as he reached his room. "Pity and sarcasm are not luxuries to be indulged in so liberally. Will he make it worse for the poor girl now? No. I think not; he was blue with fear as well as rage, and does not know how little I could really prove about that little affair at that out-of-the-way Indian hole, and the women he spent his vengeance on. Cold-blooded devil, he should have lived in the days of the

Inquisition. I didn't half believe my nephew, he was always a bit of a liar ; but I'll swear he didn't lie that time. Poor child, poor child. What a wreck it is. If only that honourable, chivalrous idiot, her father, had listened to me and sold those bank shares. And this case is only one of hundreds."

* * * * *

The fly drove up once more ; the general stepped in as calmly as he had stepped out. Heroes cannot afford to be moved by such trifles as a girl's despair at the sudden ruin of her last hope of happiness, and the rude and ruthless demolition of her love, and trust in faith and honour, and all else that is dear to a womanly heart.

Lilian had learnt her lesson well and thoroughly—knew that constancy to her lover meant for him ruin and disinheritance, and the renunciation of a profession that he loved with no common enthusiasm.

The iron grey man understood women thoroughly, and knew that they were capable of marvellous self-martyrdom.

When Lilian had it made quite clear to her mind that Dick's future depended on her, she wrote with unshrinking courage at his father's dictation, directed the envelope, and even found the proper foreign stamp.

There were no more tears or protestations—she was mute ; only the look in her eyes gave the stern veteran an uncomfortable desire not to meet them, and to quit her presence ; so putting the letter in his note-book to ensure its being posted, he went.

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A cottage with three rooms, and those of the smallest, but sweet and fresh as hands could make them.

Mrs. Pomeroy seated in a comfortable chair, knitting patiently and rapidly ; Jael bustling about her work and stopping to speak at intervals.

"I have finished this sock, Jael ; that completes the order," said her mistress at last.

"That's good, ma'am, for Nell, the pack-woman, will take them to town to-morrow," replied Jael, examining the work critically. "It's fine and even—not a stitch awry ; and now, my dear heart, I'll read ye Miss Lilian's letter again, the poor lamb."

Jael proceeded to do so, in a monotonous sing-song, which did not, however, to the fond mother's ear, detract from the joy of

listening to her daughter's letter, which was long and cheerful, speaking much of the sights of London and the comforts of her home in the house of Mrs. Midding Stoney ; and mistress and maid, in their earnest, simple prayers, entreated for God's blessing, not only on their darling child, but on the kind relative His mercy had raised up for her protection, ere they closed their eyes that night.

Mrs. Pomeroy had remained in Devonshire. Perhaps Mr. Morris could have explained how some relics of her old home were saved from the wreck, to make the cottage comfortable.

Jael had savings, and reared poultry, tended bees, and by a hundred petty economies and industries eked out the money sent by Lilian. Her mistress was her idol, and nothing could be too much to do for her.

Gentle, uncomplaining and sweet, Mrs. Pomeroy never by a single word bemoaned her fallen fortunes. Gratitude and firm faith in the goodness of her God were her strongest characteristics. Even the parting from her child, though her heart was torn by the anguish, was borne in meek silence, which was not weakness, but the outcome of true goodness.

Though she could give nothing to the poor now but kind words, they still came to tell her their griefs, and went away soothed and comforted, uplifted for a moment by her serene trust above their many cares and worries. Others visited her whom men thought past hope—sinners who could never be reclaimed—and she shrank not, but by her tenderness revived some faint belief in the God who had created so sweet a mortal.

Fallen women, reckless men—none were too wicked for her to care for and comfort.

So she lived, and was counted almost a saint by all about her, and was peaceful, content, and even happy in her life, and especially in dreaming of her child in such good, kind hands, safe from temptation and anxiety.

* * * * *

In a small, dreary back bedroom on the attic story of a dark high London house, in a narrow, though eminently respectable street, Lilian Pomeroy penned the letters which were as a ray of light in her mother's darkened life.

She had just finished one, and sat reading it with a satirical smile curling her soft rosy lips.

"Lilian, my good child, you are really an advanced and artistic liar," she said as she laid it down. "How pleased my darling and good old Jael will be to hear that I am still—so happy—with my kind relative!"

The bitterness of tone was indescribable, and doubly sad from such a fresh young mouth. The speaker gazed round scornfully at the white-washed walls and meagre fittings of her room, which recalled a prison cell. It was lighted but by a small skylight. One wooden chair, the narrowest of truckle beds, a very small chest of drawers, on which stood a looking-glass about six inches square, and an enamelled iron basin on a wooden stool, completed the furniture. A minute rug by the bed was the only superfluity.

A shrill little bell rang sharply, and Lilian hastily ran down several flights of stairs to a back drawing-room. Here the furniture was handsome, if uninteresting, in its plain solidity and black horsehair coverings, and a bright fire burnt in the grate.

At a large writing-table sat Mrs. Midding Stoney—tall, angular, flat of figure and feet, with a long, sharp-featured face, black piercing eyes under heavy brows, and black smooth hair.

"Lilian, you have been in your room for twenty-three minutes. Why this waste of precious time for which you will have to account hereafter? Remember the night cometh when no man can work."

"Not being a man, I can work at night," returned Lilian coldly. "I sat up till half-past two covering and mending your parish lending library books and tracts."

"This flippancy is a bad example for your pupils, and I hear you were late this morning, and in consequence Rebecca and Sarah, and of course the younger ones also, were defrauded of their scripture reading and catechising, which is so precious to those dear children."

"I overslept myself; but you said the books were required," said Lilian. "Had Rebecca and Sarah known their lessons there would have been time for all."

"Had you been trained in habits of industry and system you would complete the light tasks I require of you in proper time, and not have to remain up at night; and it is your unfortunate self-indulgence that renders you unable to conquer the flesh, Lilian. What signifies an hour or two less sleep and sloth, when

good works need the hand of the reaper, and young, tender souls are to be trained for heaven? How can you expect a blessing on the day thus begun?

"I have long ceased to look for blessings," said Lilian sullenly.

"Silence! unregenerate girl. You have the work for the mothers' meeting to cut out; make ten copies of the verses and music for the infants' teetotal entertainment, which you will teach them; my notes for the month's report of the Christian laundry maid's meeting you will write out neatly; and direct a hundred leaflets on 'Dress, and its evils,' to the cooks in the streets named in this list. Then hear the girls their new duets, and take the mending basket with you, as you are sadly in arrear; then the usual lesson preparation, and at seven you will dress the children and yourself, to be in the drawing-room at eight punctually. Mr. Widding Stoney will give us an able and stirring discourse on the Prophet Habbakuk, and the negro archdeacon will speak as to his mission in Corroboree Land."

"Really, it is impossible to do all this," replied Lilian. "I should be glad to be excused to-night; my head aches, and I could finish my work then."

"You can absent yourself from the family meal, and so save time for godly edification, Lilian. My step-brother's pernicious system of weak indulgence, shall not be carried on under my roof, to your ruin with regard to your training. Moral strength, self-control, habits of industry and earnestness in works of righteousness are terribly deficient in you, owing to your natural defects remaining unchecked through your father's——"

"I will not hear a word against him," cried Lilian passionately. "He was the best and dearest of men; thank God, he is in a better world, safe from trouble."

"I hope so," said the squire's step-sister coldly. "I hope so; but I fear my step-brother was not certainly of the elect and chosen. I trust he may have been accepted even at the eleventh hour, but I feel no inward conviction on the subject." And the lady shook her head solemnly, as if doubtful that heaven could contain anyone but so shining a light as herself, with possibly a few friends of her special selection to keep her company.

Lilian's sombre eyes literally blazed, and her white lips were almost bitten through as she listened to the self-righteous speech. Throwing all self-control to the winds, in another instant she

would have spoken, in her just indignation, words that never could be overlooked by her aunt ; but a third person interposed saying, in the softest of silvery bland voices :

“Anastatia, my love ; Lilian, my dear adopted child, what is thus moving you both ? There is, I trust, no cause of contention.” And placing a white fat hand on Lilian’s shoulder, he gazed into her face with a kind of unctuous paternal anxiety, and placed his other hand on her lips.

“Hush, little one, hush ; you must not let your angry passions rise under wise and just reproof,” he went on playfully. “Your dear aunt knows what is best, my child, and if you are promoted to teach her little lambs, you must not be puffed up or fancy you are a woman.”

Mr. Midding Stoney was considered very good-looking by many of his flock, for he was a preacher ; but Lilian shrank from the glance of his full blue eyes, and detested his sugared speech and the face which, for all its comeliness, was spoilt by coarse, thick lips.

She moved from him abruptly, and his wife, who was fully ten years his senior, and whose adoration for him was strongly tinged with bitter jealousy, coldly ordered her to lose no more time, but go.

She obeyed promptly, pausing a moment outside to recover her usual indifferent composed look, which concealed her real nature like a mask.

“What a fool I am,” she thought. “I must bear every insult like a slave, for if she sent me away, as she threatens, without a character, who would take me ? And my darling would starve. I am not trained as a regular governess, I could only be an under servant even if I could get a place, and I must curb my temper at any price. But oh, it’s hard, it’s hard. If we had only all died when father did.”

The scalding, bitter tears filled her eyes, but were not allowed to fall, and the girl, who had not known an ungratified whim or fancy till a few short weeks ago, resolutely went to her weary round of work with aching head and sad heart, the only one thought to cheer her in her misery being, that the sweet blind mother was so utterly deceived and so happy in her ignorance.

A hard sour-visaged maid brought her a cup of weak over-

drawn tea, and some thick slices of underdone beef, already half cold and surrounded by semi-congealed gravy; the vegetables had been forgotten, and a lump of stale bread was the only accompaniment, the whole being served on an old tray with not even a napkin, which the servant thought superfluous for a dependent in Lilian's position. This untempting meal did not delay her long, and her various tasks were completed in time to allow of her going to the drawing-room, which was a far greater penance than the uncongenial work.

She disliked those who gathered there so much. Her aunt was rich, and, in her own circle, of importance. The children were by her first husband, Mr. Midding, and he had also left her wealthy. Mr. Stoney, being poor but glib of tongue, was glad enough to persuade the well-endowed widow that he adored her, and played skilfully into her hands, making himself most amiable to the members of her favourite chapel, and using his gift of fluency on platforms as well as in private life.

His wife was narrow-minded, bitter and intolerant, but very fairly consistent, and believed her endless round of tract distribution, public meetings, drawing-room gatherings for "scriptural expositions and supper," and various forms of so-called charity, were the truest Christianity, and neither spared herself nor her money in promoting her schemes; but Mr. Midding Stoney was a thorough hypocrite. He had no objection to his wife's outlay in public charities, because it enabled him to become treasurer to many funds; and who would question the administration or the accounts of so shining an example of godliness? His zeal in good works enabled him to absent himself at all hours from the domestic hearth and its austere dulness; and he had contrived up till this time to live a dual life most successfully: the real man was a sensualist, delighting in every form of self-indulgence, and denying himself nothing; the husband of Mrs. Midding Stoney was a suave, solemn being, temperate in all things, who saw charms in no woman but his own wife; partook sparingly of the rich food he pressed on his guests, and was an ardent disciple of the teetotal cause, though professing himself liberal-minded enough not to blame those who in his own class thought otherwise.

It need hardly be said that among the guests of such a husband and wife were many hypocritical as their host, others self-righteous as his spouse.

Lilian had spent her life with a mother whose whole existence was one golden chain of good deeds, not ostentatiously performed, but the natural outcome of her sweet nature ; and with a father whose ideas as to church questions were but vague, but who was true and honourable to the core, the kindest and most just of masters and landlords, trusted and beloved alike by rich and poor ; and under their tender care and love Lilian had bid fair to grow up as good and true as her parents, but now the worst feelings of her heart seemed fast developing in the narrow, petty canting atmosphere of her new home. These evenings specially grated on her, with their would-be pious conversation, in which the holiest names were used in a familiar fashion, and the guests lamented openly the wordliness of their neighbours, and thanked God for their own superiority to all lusts of the flesh, yet greedily helped themselves to the best portions of every dish as it came round, and watched with eager eyes whether the supply of the most dainty articles of food would allow of their filling their plates to overflowing ; and later in the evening there were elderly men who fixed admiring eyes on the fairness of face and form, which Lilian could not hide, however plainly she dressed, and brushed back the rippling profusion of her bronzed hair. Their so-called fatherly endearments disgusted her. To be made a special object by name for "prayer and intercession" roused her hottest indignation, but she had to submit in silence for the sake of the salary out of which she supported her mother. She believed it liberal, though in truth she did extra work enough to have entitled her to ask double what she received ; but even had she known how to find another engagement she would have had little chance of securing it ; her striking appearance and youth were against her, and she could allege no tangible reason for leaving her aunt. She was not starved, ill-treated, or badly lodged. Her dreary room was kept scrupulously clean. The perpetual trials of temper and the state of affairs which made her life miserable beyond expression could easily be represented as the result of her bringing up, having rendered her unfit to bear reproof, however deserved. Even Mr. Morris would have exhorted her to patience had she applied to him, knowing the extreme difficulty of placing her better, and she could think of no one else to help her.

The Pomeroy's had always been so happy in their home that

they had no specially intimate friends, though universally liked and respected, and Mrs. Pomeroy's failing sight had rendered it difficult for her to go much into society. Their misfortunes were talked of, regretted, and forgotten. The new owner of Pomeroy Manor had ambition, handsome sons and daughters, and entertained right royally to get them into county society. County society went to his balls and dinners, and thought him no bad substitute, even though professing to consider him a *parvenu*.

A new terror had begun to haunt Lilian's life. The negro archdeacon evidently admired her; he distinguished her by tender glances of his rolling black eyes, held her slender white hands in his as he poured out exhortations to her to walk in the light of the Gospel, as became a poor sinner and a mere worm, and to remember that good looks were as another stumbling block in the path to heaven—a sentiment which extorted a murmur of applause from those females not afflicted with such drawbacks. Then, waxing warmer, he would draw her closer, and discourse yet more glibly as to the difficulties of becoming a really accepted lamb of the flock, and the desirability of guidance on the thorny road for the young and foolish.

His semi-amorous pressure sickened the girl, and she implored her aunt to protect her from such advances.

Mrs. Midding Stoney received the request with a withering stare. "Lilian, you shock me," she said in reply. "No girl of chaste purity could, I should have supposed, imagine that the Christian kindness of so eminent a believer as our dear archdeacon, were anything but the most delicate and proper attention to one unworthy in herself, but still to be brought to the fold like the lost sheep. Do not imagine such honour could be in store for you as to be selected for the helpmeet of that saintly man."

"Helpmeet!" exclaimed Lilian. "Do you mean wife? You do not think I would marry a negro?"

Mrs. Midding Stoney drew herself up stiffly and said impressively, "Every word you speak proves more plainly your absence of refinement, and were my daughters older, I should dread your example for their innocent minds. No well brought up maidenly girl speaks in that abrupt, brusque manner of marriage with a gentleman who has shown her no special favour. But your unfortunate entanglement with that godless youth, no doubt did much to efface the bloom of delicacy, which is such a feminine charm."

"Mr. Trevelyan was not godless ; he was all that was good and honourable," cried Lilian hotly.

"And yet, at the first breath of adversity, he deserted you, I understand," replied her aunt. "It is the way with these worldlings."

And Lilian could but keep silence. What had she to urge in reply?

Not one word had she received in answer to her letter. Dick did not even send a few lines of regret and farewell. And though no one knew it but herself, she had written to him once again. Just a few words of tenderness, asking him to believe that she should ever pray for his welfare, though parting was inevitable. Dick might have just acknowledged it, she felt, and his cool acceptance of her dismissal was the cruelest pain the poor child endured among all her sorrows.

That shining light in the religious world, Archdeacon Ashafantee, was the son of a white store-keeper and rum-seller, by a black mother, but resembled the latter almost entirely. He had been early taken up by missionaries, and found, as he grew older, that faith and humbug were very profitable professions. He abhorred hard work, and being conveniently free from the annoyance of possessing either conscience or sense of honour, soon managed to get on after a fashion, which better men could not imitate.

His father, a drunken old reprobate, was wont to say, with many oaths, that "his nigger son" was a far worse blackguard than himself ; but that bad ancient personage was in Africa ; and the archdeacon was quite the fashion in London, and made a very comfortable thing out of the subscriptions which poured in for his "mission."

It is hard to remain undetected, and the pious archdeacon, like Mr. Midding Stoney, was not all he seemed.

The negro instincts were too strong sometimes for the veneer of civilization, and, disguising himself as a common seaman, he would indulge in the most uproarious and lowest orgies.

However, he was too cunning to be readily found out, and in addition to the Central African Mission, of which he gave such glowing accounts to his dupes, he also started one to "coloured" sailors, which not only provided him with some spare cash, but might serve as a convenient blind if he were recognized in doubtful localities.

His worst lapses were, however, rarer than his more modified dissipations, and through the malicious ingenuity of a girl belonging to a low riverside theatre, he and Mr. Midding Stoney were, so to speak, unmasked to each other, to their great mutual annoyance and the delight of the mischief-maker and her "pals," who had detected that these two worthies were not what they pretended to be, and did not desire recognition.

Necessity leaving them no alternative, there was nothing to be done but swear fealty to each other; and after the first uncomfortable shock was over, they began to find advantages in playing into each other's hands.

Lilian Pomeroy was, however, likely to be the cause of discord between these allies.

Her beauty was so striking that it would have attracted notice in the most fashionable circles, and comeliness was rather the exception than the rule at Mrs. Midding Stoney's gatherings.

Moral worth, thick waists and ankles, shrill-voiced fervour and sallow skinniness prevailed among the female followers of this special line of godliness, and any pretensions to good looks were usually of the commonplace rosy-faced order.

Lilian, tall, long-limbed and graceful, with her cloud of burnished hair, and the great dark eyes shining out of her white face, was like a lily in a peony bed, and her plain black dresses heightened the contrast, as she moved among the ladies who wore gorgeous and rustling silks, and beflowered bonnets, copied from cheap fashion papers by fifth-rate dressmakers and milliners.

The archdeacon meant matrimony, being quite aware that the aunt would not oppose him, and that if he wearied of his prize, as he felt might be possible, it would not be impossible to take her on a mission to some African swamp, where a young English girl would be pretty sure to succumb to the climate, which he could bear unharmed.

Mr. Midding Stoney's intentions were undefined. He could hardly flatter himself that Lilian would accept his protection, though he saw how miserable his wife made the poor girl.

He frequented the schoolroom as much as he could, gloating with greedy eyes on the young teacher's beauty. Advances of a "paternal" style were not only repulsed by Lilian, but reported by his step-daughters to their mother.

These children were of the precocious priggish kind usually produced by such training as that of the Midding Stoney school. Forced into premature and absolutely ungenue professions of conversion and religion, they were sharp enough to catch up the style of talk dear to their mother, and pretended to love long sermons and catechisms better than play or story books, finding themselves consequently flattered and quoted as shining examples of infant piety.

This system, which starved all natural childish instincts, forced them to seek amusement otherwise; and Lilian and her backslidings were exciting. They distorted and exaggerated, till their mother became suspicious and wildly jealous of the niece whom she fancied was trying to fascinate Mr. Midding Stoney, of whose charms the wife had an exalted idea.

The children seeing they produced an effect, exaggerated more and more, and Mrs. Midding Stoney watched and listened at doors, and let the suspicion eat like vitriol into her soul.

Womanlike, she laid the entire blame on Lilian, and thought her husband the victim of an unscrupulous female. A sensible person would have sent Lilian to some other situation; her aunt longed to revenge herself.

Matters culminated at last. Rebecca and Sarah, sent upstairs on an errand, reported that "papa" was in the schoolroom, where Lilian was making up clothing club reports, and directing tracts.

Their mother's eyes gleamed revengefully. The archdeacon had but just left her, having made a formal offer for Lilian's hand. He, too, was moved by jealousy, and had skilfully thrown out hints which were as fuel to the flame.

Lilian should be forced to marry him, but she should also be humiliated and detected.

Upstairs with stockinged feet crept Mrs. Midding Stoney. She heard at first but the sound of voices, provokingly indistinct.

Suddenly there was a scuffle, a noise as of an overturned chair, a stifled cry.

Some wives would have dashed open the door. Mrs. Midding Stoney opened it an inch, and beheld Lilian in her husband's embrace.

She was no match in cunning for that saintly soul. The click of the latch caught his ear, even as he pressed the girl to him so

tightly, that she could not struggle; and he pushed her away promptly, saying, "Lilian, my dear child, you forget yourself—this is unseemly—my arms are open to you as a father, but you must exercise maidenly discretion, and abstain from all appearance of evil. Though my character is above suspicion, my love, I would not have you seen thus moved by servants, whose vulgar minds might misinterpret your impulse of filial love."

He would have made his fortune on the stage; even his wife's suspicions were lulled for the moment.

Panting and beside herself with indignation, Lilian could but gasp out:

"Filial love—I *hate* you."

"Hush, my child, hush, you are hysterical. I will call your aunt; she will soothe you."

Mr. Widding Stoney went to the second door of the school-room, and his wife entering by the other, said with austere dignity:

"May I inquire what ails you, Lilian?"

The girl driven to bay, by a strong effort commanded herself, and began her explanation; but she saw too clearly that she was trapped.

Mr. Midding Stoney suavely, but firmly, interrupted; and while pretending to explain in her behalf, made it appear that the whole scene was of her making.

His wife listened with freezing severity written on her face. How much she believed of his tale was doubtful; it suited her to appear to do so.

In a few curt words she set forth her belief that Lilian was a mere Delilah, but possibly might reform in good hands, and that the mercy of heaven had been specially manifested in the arch-deacon's offer, which opened to her a hope of salvation and conversion by the pious example and conversation of so eminent a Christian.

Lilian, trembling, but firm, rejected the proposal in no measured words.

"I would rather die," she said proudly.

"You probably will, you hardened immodest girl; your sins will find you out, and that right speedily. Advances to married men are more to your depraved taste than heaven-ordained pure marriage," said her aunt. "I trust my sinful weakness in

regarding the tie of blood, will not be visited on the innocent flowerets whom you have, perhaps, contaminated by your contact. Go to your room, and to-night, after united prayer for you, we will hear your decision."

"I will give it now," returned Lilian defiantly. "I will not marry that man. I will starve first."

"And your mother will starve also," replied the aunt spitefully. "So much for the profession of affection for her that you have made, selfish, unnatural daughter."

"I will get another situation. Mr. Morris will recommend me, if you will not," retorted Lilian.

"Mr. Morris is paralyzed, has lost his speech, and will never recover. I heard so from his partner," said Mr. Midding Stoney suavely.

Lilian stared at him unbelievably for a moment. Then, seeing that he spoke truly, broke down into passionate weeping, and, flying up to her room, locked the door to obtain at least solitude and a brief respite.

The hours passed, and still Lilian crouched by her bed. The short day was hastened to its close by fog, and darkness set in, but she heeded nothing. Cold, want of food, and physical discomfort were not felt by her in her despair.

Where could she turn? What friendly hand would deliver her from this hopeless state of misery?

She prayed passionately, almost incoherently, and thought immediate response must come; then, in her desperate anguish, she rebelled hysterically, and gave way to wild words of upbraiding and anger against the heaven she deemed merciless.

Finally she forced herself to think, and almost believed it her duty to marry that her mother might have food and clothing.

Her instincts were too strong, however. She felt so vividly that the man was bad and untrustworthy, that it was borne in to her mind that her sacrifice might be vain.

There were footsteps at last on the stairs, and a knock at the door.

Lilian opened it, and her aunt entered, looking colder and harder than ever. As well expect pity from a bronze statue as from a woman of determined temper, and yet bitterly jealous.

Mrs. Midding Stoney had mentally reviewed the situation, and knew in her inmost heart that her husband admired the beauty

of the slender girl who looked at her with such piteous eyes. She would revenge herself on him through Lilian, whether the girl was blameless or not.

The interview was brief and decisive. The alternative of refusal of the archdeacon's offer was instant return to Devonshire.

No one could accuse the aunt of injustice. Lilian had failed in her duty, could no longer be trusted to instruct young children; her fare back to her mother's home would be paid, a servant sent with her to the station to meet the earliest train, and her aunt would write an explanation.

Lilian urged her mother's helplessness and utter want of means, implored her aunt to help her to other employment—but in vain. The reply to each entreaty was cutting and cruel, as only such a woman could make it. In conclusion, Mrs. Midding Stoney rang a bell, and a tray of food was brought, orders given as to the early morning start, and the aunt retired, leaving Lilian to pack.

She determined to swallow something, however distasteful the process might be, and then saw there was a letter on the tray.

It was from Jael, telling of her mother's increasing delicacy, and asking for more money, if possible, to buy her necessaries.

Lilian had submitted to the order to return to Devonshire. Now she determined to seek work at any price in London.

But the letter to her mother—how could it be stopped? Stung to sudden impulse, Lilian slipped off her shoes, crept down and examined the letters ready for post in the ordinary receptacle.

It was there, and, hastily securing it, Lilian substituted an envelope, in which she inclosed a tract from the piles on her aunt's table, directed it in imitation of Mrs. Midding Stoney's writing, and went back as stealthily as she had descended, feeling that her action had been dishonourable, but caring nothing if by it her mother was spared one sad hour of wearying anxiety about her child.

* * * * *

In a dark, drizzling morning Lilian was sent from her only relative's house ere daybreak, no one to say a kind word, or bid her good-bye, a sullen maid, cross at having to go out so early, her sole companion in the jolting, draughty cab which conveyed her to the station. The servant, finding they were before the

time, gladly accepted Lilian's suggestion, and drove home without waiting to see her charge off, and Lilian deliberately booked her box, and, turning from the station, went out into the dreary unknown streets, as soon as the wintry morning became light enough to allow of her doing so.

She was not wholly purposeless, for in her walks with her pupils she had noticed a church which seemed generally open, and to which gentlewomen wearing the dress of sisters, and thin curates, in long black coats, were always going at all hours.

Rebecca and Sarah informed her that it was a high church, quite an improper place in their narrow ideas, "positively popish—almost idolatrous."

Lilian fancied anything opposed to the Midding Stoney school must number more kindly souls in its congregation, and hope-inspired, went on, finding her way with difficulty, but reaching her goal at last.

There was a sound of music as she neared the door, lights, incense and flowers, soft chanting and a pleasant sense of warmth within. Lilian entered quietly and knelt down, not heeding much what was going on, but weary and glad to rest.

It was some festival, and she watched the procession dreamily, the gorgeous vestments of the clergy and the little choristers gay in scarlet and white, were a novelty to the country-bred girl. Surely if these good people knew of her trouble they would help her. The price of the flowers around her would keep her blind mother for weeks.

Lilian waited eagerly till the music died away and all was over, then boldly went to a kneeling sister, and when she rose followed closely, and, laying a hand on her cloak, begged to be allowed a hearing.

The sister, accustomed to such requests, bade her accompany her, and soon Lilian was unfolding her tale impetuously and eagerly to the mother superior of the sisterhood, and it was listened to patiently and attentively; but when she finished, and looked hopefully at the auditor, her heart fell. The serene, calm face of the mother remained unmoved.

The poor child's narrative seemed to her trivial, compared to the miseries and horrors of the slums where her life had been spent in working for the very outcasts. Lilian had but given

the impression that she was an excitable, petted child, rebellious against authority ; and though the mother disapproved entirely of Mrs. Midding Stoney's views, yet she knew her to be liberal with her money, and advised the niece to return and implore pardon and reconciliation.

"Never, never!" cried the girl hotly. "Oh, do—do give me work here."

"Work, my child? For what are you fitted?" said the mother superior with a gentle smile. "We might possibly find you some employment, but it would not pay for your board, and you have to provide for your parent."

Vainly Lilian argued and implored. Other sisters came and listened, but were unimpressed. In her eagerness, and with nerves unstrung by the trial of the last day at her aunt's house, and her sleepless night, Lilian became over-excited, and her statements seemed foolish and exaggerated to these good women, who had seen such suffering, sin and sorrow, that they could not sympathize with this girl who had nothing very tangible to complain of.

She had been fed and clothed—girls young and fair as she were dying by inches of starvation and want. She was in health, while thousands suffered tortures from hereditary disease, aggravated by destitution. She had been asked in marriage by a man she disliked—others were driven to sin by their own mothers before they knew right from wrong ; and with all these and such as these the sisters had saint-like patience, and felt for them the charity which would fain hide all the hideous moral blackness and suffering of the world, as the snow does the dirt of the streets and lanes of the great city. But Lilian's case was out of their groove, and they could only advise her to go back to her aunt ; and if she would not be advised she must take her own way.

Lilian gave in at last, and returned to the church to seek for a clergyman.

She found one in time, an excellent man according to his own lights, an enthusiastic ascetic, who over-worked and over-fasted systematically, denying himself everything but the barest necessities of life ; and possibly because of this he had become a mere priest—a mechanical fulfiller of every duty of his profession—but absolutely out of touch with the complex needs of

human sufferers, and devoid of all warm-hearted, kindly sympathy, and of the gracious manner which sometimes makes a few words of interest and pity almost as precious as a gift.

Lilian had, by her own confession, lived out of the pale of his special church, and, therefore, he could dictate to her as to the alteration of views which alone, in his opinion, would be of use to her. Forms of prayer, several daily services, guilds, associations—all these things were the frame-work of his own existence, and absolutely necessary in his ideas.

But as to the girl's urgent temporal needs he had nothing to say, and could not advise. Her passionate eagerness and anxiety seemed to him absurd. He could do without tempting food or wine, and thought that every one else should follow his example.

This white-faced creature, pleading for help to find work by which her mother could be kept from physical hardship, awakened no touch of pity. The mother was not absolutely starving—all the daughter could urge was that she missed the comforts she had always had. Let her practise self-denial and spiritual discipline of the body, and turn her thoughts to higher things.

Lilian, losing hope as she watched his face hardening in expression, urged, perhaps unwisely, that surely it would be better to aid a blind, helpless lady, than to spend so lavishly on hothouse flowers in the church.

She was sternly silenced before her speech was concluded, and bidden not to speak with such irreverence on subjects evidently beyond her comprehension. She had stumbled on the point, in fact, which was nearest her listener's heart. The church was his idol, inseparable in its outward visible shape from its spiritual significance. He would deny himself a great-coat in winter, but spent with lavish hand on exotics, and far more substantial decorations too, for his beloved building; and was never so near eloquence as when he was extorting from the rich members of his flock more money for some fresh scheme of adornment.

And this rash, ignorant child dared to suggest that her invalid mother was a matter of greater importance than the church!

He had walked patiently with her until now, but instead of taking her to his room as he had intended at first, that he might

finish the interview there, he remembered that he was due at a guild meeting, and left her.

Persistence was strong in Lilian, and she wandered on wearily, asking for directions to "a church" of any one who looked good-natured. Probably many doubted her sanity; but it saved trouble to pass her on, and at last she learnt the name of a church, and soon reached it, and a woman who was cleaning it out gave her the junior curate's address. The rector was ill, laid up with bad influenza, the dame said, and the senior curate absent.

She found a nervous, rosy-faced, spectacled young man, who was visibly embarrassed at her appearance. Bidding her sit down, he seated himself at the opposite side of the room, on the edge of his chair, and during her narrative kept up a running fire of interjections, as :

"Dear me. Dear me. How distressing. But really—I'm afraid—er—yes—er—I don't know—er——"

Still, to poor inexperienced Lilian, he seemed kinder than her other listeners, and when at length he rose, and, upsetting a flower vase in his nervousness, stood before the fireplace with his spectacles pushed on to his forehead, she impulsively jumped up and with eager hands on his arm was pleading as for her life, when a severe voice said at the door :

"Augustus, who is this?"

Turning with a start, Lilian saw a prim, severe female gazing on her with decided disapproval written on every line of her austere visage.

The curate stammered out some rather incoherent explanation, ending by a kind of awkward introduction of the newcomer as "My aunt, Miss Virginia Simkins."

The lady added in acidulated tones :

"I am a far fitter adviser for young—persons—of your sex than my nephew, and you should have asked for me."

Lilian meekly explained that she was unaware of Miss Simkin's existence, or would have done so; and once more began her tale.

Miss Simkins put on a pair of pale-blue "goggles," and stared through them stonily at the poor girl, who felt like some helpless fluttering bird under the eyes of a fierce cat, and faltered in her narrative in a fashion that convinced Miss Virginia of its being

utterly false. Good looks were to that austere virgin a kind of danger signal, and she sniffed at intervals incredulously, having made up her mind that, but for her timely intervention, "the designing bold minx" would have endeavoured to fascinate her nephew, whom she looked on as a mere child in all worldly matters, liable to be taken in by all unscrupulous people.

With scant ceremony she sent the Rev. Augustus about his business, and, having got rid of that inconveniently soft-hearted young man, proceeded to cross-examine Lilian in the most searching manner, plainly showing that she regarded her as an impostor, and ended by offering her "plain work" at a public workroom established by herself and other ladies of similar sentiments, who were at least unanimous in regarding poverty as a crime to be expiated, and in offering a rate of pay which enabled their workers to earn a shilling a day by many long hours of unremitting toil and drudgery. This charitable and generous aid being refused by Lilian, who gently pointed out that she could hardly live and keep a blind mother out of such earnings, Miss Simkins promptly treated her to a crushing lecture, on the sin of trying to obtain money on false pretences, and refusing to earn it, when work was pressed on her by Christian and benevolent ladies; and wound up by threatening to hand Lilian over to the police if she ever applied again, mentally deciding that the innocent Augustus should be protected from such wiles.

Depressed and scared, Lilian went on her way, and in a wretched back street found a room to let, which she hired, thankful that her landlady, though morose, seemed respectable. Then began the weary task of seeking work, uselessly applying everywhere, and answering advertisements; trying everything she could think of, and, of course, vainly. Shop managers might fancy her tall graceful figure to show off their wares, but the want of a character was too great an obstacle. As a servant her ignorance made her useless. No lady would take so handsome a governess under such circumstances.

Lilian sold her watch and few trinkets, sent the money to Jael, and bade her not expect a letter for some days, nor write, as she was going on a visit. Then, taught by her landlady, she found her way to the pawnshop, and bit by bit her clothes went.

She dreaded unspeakably the day when she should be driven

from her lodging, miserable as it was, for it was a shelter, and she half-starved herself to eke out her money.

A long weary tramp ending again in disappointment, broke down her spirits so utterly, that, finding a bench on the Embankment, she sat down and cried ; presently the cold struck through her thin dress and numbed her ; she tried to rise ; darkness seemed to enwrap her, and she knew no more for a time.

Struggling back to life she found an arm under her head, and a good-natured smart, rather handsome girl, bending over her, and dimly heard a voice say :

"Now, Bobbie, my old pal, hook it. This one ain't drunk ; she's fainted. It's not a job for you, unless you've a drop of brandy on you."

The policeman laughed and shook his head, but indicated that there was a "pub" handy.

The girl spoke to a third person, a youth flashily dressed, who ran off, and in a few minutes returned with something in a glass, which Lilian swallowed, though it half choked her.

The effect was rapid, and she sat up and began to thank the good-natured stranger.

"Shut up, missie," said the latter. "Are you steady on your pins, do you think ? for we'll get out of this if you are. Bill, take that arm ; I'll take t'other. Come along, my dear."

A crowd of course had gathered, and Lilian was too glad to escape to care with whom she went.

Her simple confidence in the goodwill of her companions amused them, and they interchanged winks and smiles as they led her on.

"Where was you going when you took bad?" asked the girl of Lilian, after a minute or two.

Lilian explained briefly, and her companion after a pause said :

"Look here, missie, I ain't a fool, and I sees you're another sort to me ; but it's a long way to where you're keeping, so will you just come and have tea with Bill and me friendly?"

A few months back how Lilian's eyes would have opened with surprise at such an invitation ; now, poor desolate lonely child, she put her little hand out to the strange girl, and, taking hers, thanked her warmly, and asked what she might call her.

"Oh, Kit ; just Kit, my dear. Bill, let's get a 'bus ; come on."

Down in an unknown locality was Kit's residence, but the room proved fairly tidy ; the tea, accompanied by watercress and eggs, was sufficiently refreshing to be most acceptable, and if Kit was vulgar, at least she was the essence of good nature, and had taken a violent fancy to her guest. Lilian's damp shoes were dried, Bill set to toast her nice little thin slices of bread, and sent for fresher butter and a few slices of cut ham, in spite of Lilian's remonstrances. The room had a bed in it, and a table stood near with many pieces of bright stuff on it.

Kit explained that she had a crippled sister who worked a bit for neighbours, hat trimming and so on.

"Does she earn much?" asked Lilian eagerly.

Kit shook her head.

"Not enough for her grub always. I can make up, though."

And, in answer to Lilian's questioning, went on to explain that she danced at a theatre, and was fairly paid on the whole. "Bill, he was a stage carpenter."

Her mother's dread of a theatre and her aunt's denunciations of these "sinks of iniquity," recurred to Lilian as she sat silently by the fire, while Kit and Bill whispered aside. Presently their conference ended, and Kit explained that they fancied Lilian might get a place at the theatre also. They knew the manager was "in a fix," as the girl who had been engaged as principal figure in a group, had "gone off to Paris with a swell that day."

Lilian hardly comprehended ; but the idea of any employment was tempting. Good people could not, or would not, help her. She must do what she could, thought the poor girl. The crippled sister entered as she thought it over. A shrewd creature, with a sharp pretty face and deformed back and leg, she promptly threw herself into the argument, and assured Lilian it would be "her making ;" and in an aside urged on Kit to take her off at once.

"She's a real stunner, Kit. Look at her eyes and her hair. Old Crusty ought to give you a rise for finding him such a beauty."

Almost without her consent, Lilian was swept off by Kit's impulsiveness, and presently found herself in the presence of a bustling, business-like man, who questioned her, looked at her keenly, but, though noting her height, graceful carriage and beautiful face, critically, evinced no more admiration than if she were a handsome horse that he required for stage purposes.

He made her an offer in money, which she would have closed

with gratefully, had not Kit contrived to whisper a hint to "stand out for more."

Finally she was engaged at fair terms, Kit being commissioned to take care of her "till the rawness was off." And twenty-four hours later the curtain of the Frivolity Theatre rose on a new operetta, and the limelight gleamed on the rounded white neck and arms, and glorious masses of hair, of the new stage beauty "Dolores," who had practically nothing to do or to say, but was merely paid to let the eyes of men gaze their fill on her fair face and form, and the tongues of women detract from her charms, and pronounce her worthless, bold and shameless.

And while they stared and whispered, the poor child underwent all the tortures that were the inevitable portion of one reared as she had been, in such a situation.

Kit could not feel for her. She thought it fun to show her neat active limbs in the ballet ; and Lilian hid her misery from all, and whispered over and over to herself :

"It is for my mother's sake, my poor blind mother's sake."

Her grace and beauty were undeniable, her nervousness unimportant, and ere the curtain fell, the manager knew that his chance find was a success.

(To be concluded.)

Celia.

By EDITH STANIFORTH.

VENICE, in the month of May, the air balmy and sweet, freshened by the breeze from the sea. A room in an old palace on one of the side canals—a palace that has seen better days, and is now degraded into a lodging-house, in which the princely owners live in an obscure corner, and let the best rooms to strangers, supporting themselves by the hire. Before the great Venetian mirror stands a young Englishman, putting the finishing touches to his toilet by the light of two tall wax candles that faintly disperse the surrounding gloom. A good-looking young man, tall and straight and clean of limb, with a look of distinction about his clear-cut features.

Rupert Carew was making the grand tour, as it was called in those days, when every young man of birth and fortune felt it incumbent on him to see something of the world before settling down. For I write of sixty years ago, when cheap trips were unknown, and people thought as much of a journey to Paris as we do of a visit to Cairo. He was an only son, heir to a fine old estate in the west of England. He had travelled leisurely through France and Germany, seeing all there was to be seen, and now he was at Venice for the Carnival—Venice at its gayest, for the Austrians were in occupation, and though Italian patriotism groaned beneath the iron heel of the invader, there is little doubt that the shopkeepers, at any rate, profited materially by his presence. All Rupert's sympathies were on the Italian side, yet, strange to say, his greatest friend was an Austrian, Count von Falkenberg, whom he had promised to meet that night on the Piazza.

One last glance at the mirror, and Rupert sprang down the stairs to where a gondola awaited him, lying like a great black swan on the silent dark green water. He stepped in and they glided away through dark streets and lonely byways, where a single lamp glimmered occasionally before a solitary shrine, till

they emerged on the Grand Canal. Here it was brighter ; lights flashed from the palace windows, and the sound of distant music floated upon the air. The great red moon was rising over the sandy shores of Lido, lighting up the silver cupola of Santa Maria della Salute on the right, and throwing out into darker distinctness the outline of the island of St. George.

"Would the signore care to follow the music?" asked Rupert's gondolier, as they drew near to a large boat hung with coloured lanterns and crowded with musicians.

The young man nodded, and the boatman cutting in deftly through the throng of gondolas already assembled, secured a good place. Rupert leant back on his cushions and listened with dreamy enjoyment while they drifted along with the tide. The scene, the hour, would have infused poetry into the most prosaic spirit, and Rupert's was no sluggish temperament. The Carews were an ardent race who had distinguished themselves by flood and field, and though his lot had been cast in the sober, practical days of the nineteenth century, the fiery blood of his ancestors still ran in his veins, ready to declare itself when the occasion served.

Floating along unheeding he was suddenly startled by a sharp shock and a loud cry, and looking up saw that a gondola had got entangled with his own. It was disengaged in a moment and speeding on its way, but not before he had caught sight of a female figure dressed in white, a fair pale face with a halo of golden hair.

"Follow that gondola," he exclaimed, obeying a sudden impulse, and his man obeyed. But those in front were more than a match for him, and before Rupert could reach the landing-stage the fair unknown had disembarked, and was lost to sight in the crowd.

"You are late, my Rupert," said a voice at his elbow, and a young man in uniform laid a hand on his arm. "The band has already begun. But whom do you seek?" as Carew looked round with a puzzled, disappointed expression.

"A dream, a vision. Did you not see her?"

"What was she like?"

"Fair as an angel. Her face shaded by a large white hat with a drooping feather, and eyes of heavenly blue. She passed me just now in a gondola. I thought she looked sad."

“And you wished to console her? Take care, *mein lieber*. That is a dangerous game to play in this country. You may find a knife stuck between your ribs before you know where you are.”

“Her face, somehow, was familiar. I felt as though I had seen her before. And yet that could hardly be.”

“In some former state, perhaps, when her heart beat in unison with yours.”

But Carew, scarcely conscious of his friend's raillery, was gazing eagerly round in search of the object of his thoughts. He uttered a sudden exclamation :

“There she is !”

“Where? Whew !” with a long low whistle, as his glance, following Rupert's, fell on a lady seated at a little distance by the side of an officer. “You have fallen badly, my friend. That is the Baroness von Redwitz, a countrywoman of yours, by-the-bye, the wife of my colonel, an ugly customer, I can tell you, as jealous as Othello himself.”

“Introduce me, there's a good fellow.”

Falkenberg hung back.

“Look here, Carew, you had better let it alone. If you want to get up a flirtation——”

“Well ?”

“Choose some one else. Von Redwitz is not the sort of man to stand any nonsense about his wife. He is the best swordsman in the regiment.”

“Thanks, I can take care of myself,” said Rupert shortly.

Falkenberg smiled.

“So your pride is up in arms? Be it so. You can take care of yourself. But how about the lady? The woman generally gets the worst of it on these occasions. If his suspicions are once roused—and it is not very difficult to rouse them, I can tell you—I pity her !”

“Why, what would happen ?”

“He would probably beat her.”

“Good God! you don't mean it!” exclaimed Carew, with all an Englishman's horror at the bare idea.

“I do. Report says he has done so more than once already. Now, Rupert, have I convinced you ?”

“No, you have not,” recovering himself, and bent more than

ever on the accomplishment of his design. "You are making mountains out of molehills. Surely one can say a few words to a pretty woman without running into a tragic love affair."

"Let it be only a few words, then. On that condition I shall be happy to introduce you."

Rupert agreed, and crossing the square Falkenberg presented "My friend, Mr. Carew," to the Baroness von Redwitz. But the words had scarcely left his lips when there was a simultaneous cry of:

"Rupert!"

"Celia!"

And both hands were held out in eager greeting.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Carew. "No wonder I seemed to know your face."

"You recognized me, then?"

"Frankly, no. You have changed too much. But there was something familiar about you all the same."

"No wonder," she laughed, though her eyes were swimming. "And you too have changed—have grown so tall, so handsome."

"Spare my blushes," answered Rupert smiling. "And pardon an awkward Englishman for having no pretty speeches at his command."

The look he bent on her was more eloquent than words. Falkenberg fidgeted in the background, and the baroness, averting her eyes, startled as she encountered the scowling visage of her husband.

"I had forgotten," she said with an effort. "Max, this is Mr. Carew, a friend of my childhood; Rupert, my husband."

The two men bowed, but there was little friendliness in the glance they interchanged.

"Confound him!" thought Rupert. "What the devil does he mean by his sulky face? I should like to kick him."

Some one came up at that moment and claimed the baron's attention. Rupert took advantage of the opportunity to slip into a chair by Celia's side, and they lost themselves speedily in mutual recollections. Their low-toned conversation, interrupted now and then by a silvery laugh from the baroness, seemed to have a peculiarly irritating effect on her husband's nerves. He stammered, lost the thread of his discourse, and more than once his hand stole to his sword as though he would have liked to

inflict punishment then and there on the presumptuous intruder. At last the baroness looked up, caught sight of his face, and turned very pale.

"Rupert," she said hurriedly, "you will not misunderstand me? You know how happy it has made me to see you again. Do not be vexed if I ask you to leave me."

He understood her at once.

"I will do anything you wish. But you don't mean to say you are afraid of him?"

"Don't ask me. He is my husband, remember. Only—if we should not meet again——"

"Not meet again!" interrupted Carew. "I mean to see *you*, I can tell you. When and where are you to be found?"

She lowered her voice.

"I dare not ask you to call. But I am going to a masked ball at the C. Palace on Tuesday. Count von Falkenberg can get you an invitation. I shall wear a grey domino with a lilac bow."

"I will be there."

He rose and taking her hand was about to raise it to his lips, but remembering Falkenberg's warning he dropped it and turned away.

Celia Trelawney was the daughter of his nearest neighbour. They had played together as children, then her father died, and her mother took her abroad. He lost sight of her, but he did not forget her. Deep down in his heart he cherished a tender recollection of his little playmate and a wish to meet her again. But not thus as the wife of a stranger and an alien who regarded him with angry suspicion. If he had found her happy he would have admired her indeed, but she would have made no impression on his heart. As it was, the remembrance of the look on her face aroused every chivalrous feeling in his nature.

"An invitation to the ball at the C. Palace? Nothing is easier," said Falkenberg when Carew preferred his request. "But, Rupert, *mon cher*, be careful. Remember what I told you."

"Don't be alarmed. The Baroness von Redwitz and I are old friends and country neighbours—nothing more."

The count looked doubtful.

"Hum!" he observed. "In my country we don't always

understand old friendships with the other sex. But you know your own affairs best. I have warned you ; I can do no more."

Armed with this invitation, Rupert mingled in the crowd that thronged the stately rooms of the C. Palace on the night of the ball. Only the women wore masks, but the men were in fancy dress and the scene was a brilliant one. Rupert had chosen the costume of his namesake, Prince Rupert of Bohemia, and looked the character to the life. More than one fair dame, attracted by the appearance of the handsome young cavalier, sought to detain him in conversation, but one object engrossed his thoughts, and he presently descried her leaning on the arm of an officer in the Austrian uniform of a hundred years before, engaged in deep and earnest conversation. At Rupert's approach she relinquished her hold and Falkenberg, for it was he, retired, casting as he went a meaning glance at his friend, which Rupert wilfully declined to meet.

"At last!" exclaimed Carew. "I almost despaired of finding you in this crowd. Shall we take a turn?"

Celia assented, and the band striking up at that moment they floated away, their feet moving in perfect unison, her head resting against his shoulder, his arm closely encircling her waist. Perhaps there is no more delightful sensation than to feel that you have a partner who suits you exactly. Rupert and Celia prolonged it to the uttermost. Not till the last notes died away did they desist, and then, avoiding the stream that flowed towards the doorway, Rupert directed their steps to a little alcove at the farther end of the room, half hidden by a crimson velvet curtain, with just room in it for two.

Celia removed her mask and disclosed a pale, troubled face and eyes that were full of tears.

"Oh, Rupert," she sighed, "I fear this is very wrong. Count von Falkenberg thinks it is most imprudent."

"I wish to goodness von Falkenberg would mind his own concerns," cried Rupert angrily.

"You must not be vexed with him. He means to be kind, and he knows my husband. But is it not unreasonable? That I should be forced to meet you like this—my old friend, my brother almost."

Rupert's feelings towards her were not precisely brotherly, but he saw no reason for enlightening her on that point.

"I ought perhaps to have resisted the temptation. But I could not. You belong to the Past—the dear Past which I never hear of now. And what harm can there be in my seeing you? It is his suspicion that drives me to concealment."

"Celia," said Rupert, bending forward, "tell me. Is it true what they say? Has he dared to lay his hand on you?"

"Who told you?"

"It is true, then! Good God! And you remain with him!"

"What would you have me do? He is my husband. My life is a hard one, but I chose it myself. I must make the best of it."

She raised her eyes as she spoke and the words died away on her lips, for standing in the archway, his face livid with rage, she beheld her husband.

"Madame," he said with quivering lips, "your gondola awaits you. It is time to go home."

And he almost dragged her away. Rupert started forward to interfere, but an imploring glance from Celia checked him, and he gloomily retraced his steps to the ball-room, where he found von Falkenberg carrying on an outrageous flirtation with a pretty young married woman whose husband apparently was not troubled with jealousy. With some difficulty he succeeded in getting him away and inducing him to listen to his tale.

"Ah, *mon cher!*" said that prudent and far-sighted individual. "What did I tell you? But of course you knew best. However, it is too late to speak of that now. There is only one thing to be done. You must go away."

"And leave her in the power of that brute? Indeed, I will do nothing of the kind!"

"What good will you do by remaining? You will only make matters worse. It strikes me you have made mischief enough already."

"That may be, but it would be the act of a coward to run away and let her bear the brunt of it."

"The act of a wise man rather. If you think you will be allowed to see her again you are much mistaken. You have aroused the suspicions of a gloomy, revengeful tyrant, and every hour you remain is a source of danger to yourself—you smile—and to her."

The last suggestion seemed to carry some weight. Rupert knitted his brows.

"Falkenberg," he said at length, "you may be right. But—" his voice faltered a little—"I will tell you the truth. I love her. How can I bear to leave her thus?"

"All the more reason, Rupert, *mein lieber*," laying his hand in his earnestness on the young man's shoulder. "Listen to me. I have seen something of life. I am no prudish maid to start at trifles. But I swear to you that were I in your place, I would sooner die than sully the purity of that sweet lady's soul. There is something about her above and beyond most women. I feel in her presence as though I were in church. And yet her very innocence leads her into danger."

"Do you think I would offend her ears with anything unfit for them to hear?" cried Rupert indignantly.

"Not now—not in your sober senses, but passion is an unruly steed. Take my advice and go before harm comes of it."

* * * * *

Three days later Rupert Carew was enjoying his breakfast at the open window of a room in an inn in one of the villages of the Lake of Garda. The sparkling water lay at his feet; behind rose hill and mountain, blue and misty in the morning light. Here and there a snowy sail skimmed the placid surface of the lake, and on a rocky height almost facing the window stood a frowning castle, once the seat of some robber baron, now occupied by the Austrian troops. It was like a scene in a play. Rupert's eyes feasted on the lovely prospect. Away from the scene of his enchantment he was beginning to recover his senses and to feel that Falkenberg was right. Since Celia and he could never be more to one another it was better for them not to meet. It was difficult to reason thus calmly in Venice, where the very air breathed of romance and a lovely woman seemed a fair excuse for folly. But here in broad daylight, the fresh mountain breeze blowing in, dispersing the cobwebs of his brain, things seemed to assume their just proportions of their own accord.

He had reached this stage in his meditations when the door burst open, and a female figure, cloaked and hooded, rushed into the room. She flung herself at his feet; the hood fell back and disclosed the lovely agitated features and golden hair of his early playmate.

"Oh, Rupert!" she cried. "Save me! He threatened to kill me. Then a message came for him from the governor and he

had to go. I stole away in his absence. My maid helped me and came with me. Oh, Rupert! you are my only friend. You knew my father. You will not abandon me?"

"Never," he answered; and raising her from the ground:

"Celia," he said gravely, "do you trust me?"

"Entirely—absolutely," looking at him with fearless, wide-open eyes.

"Will you leave yourself in my hands to act for you as I think best?"

"Willingly," she answered.

"Thank you. I swear before God to be worthy of your trust. You must not stay here. Your maid, you say, is below?"

She bent her head.

"Excuse me, then, a moment."

He sat down and wrote a letter, sealed it and rang the bell. It was answered by his servant, an impenetrable-looking individual, devoted to his young master and quite ready to risk life and limb in his service.

"Grant," said Carew, "you will order a carriage with postillions to be ready in a couple of hours. You will then accompany this lady and her maid to Falkenberg Castle and place this letter yourself in the hands of the countess."

"And you, sir?"

"I shall remain here for the present."

The man saluted and was about to withdraw, when Rupert stopped him.

"Wait a minute. Have you breakfasted?" turning to Celia. "I thought not. Grant, bring fresh coffee and eggs, and anything else you can think of. And look after the maid, by-the-bye. You will find her downstairs."

"You must eat," he continued, as Celia attempted some feeble protest. "You have a long journey before you. I have written to Falkenberg's mother, asking her to receive you and explaining the state of the case. She is an old friend of my father's and kindness itself. You will be safe and happy with her and your husband will not dream of seeking you there."

"How can I thank you!" she murmured brokenly. "And you, what will you do?"

"Stay here and answer any questions your husband sees fit to put to me."

Celia turned deadly pale.

"Rupert!" she exclaimed.

"You would not have me run away as if I were afraid to meet him?"

"I would have you consult your own safety—for my sake. Oh, Rupert, I should never forgive myself if anything happened to you through my fault."

"Nothing will happen," he answered lightly. "Set your mind at rest; I will be most prudent."

What more he would have said remained unspoken, for a second time the door flew open. This time it was Celia's maid who entered, wringing her hands.

"Madame," she cried, "we are undone. A sergeant and a file of men are waiting to arrest you."

Rupert sprang to his feet with an oath.

"The cowardly blackguard!" he muttered between his teeth. "Stay here, Celia, and don't be alarmed. I will settle the matter."

He pealed the bell and, passing into the adjoining room, buckled on his sword and took up a pair of small but deadly-looking pistols which he hid inside his coat.

"Grant," he said, as his servant appeared, "have you got a revolver handy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Fetch it, then; we may find it useful."

He ran downstairs. The men were drawn up in the courtyard. Rupert stood in the doorway and made a sign to the sergeant, who, after a moment's indecision obeyed the summons.

"You are sent here," he began, "by Baron Von Redwitz?"

"To bring back the baroness."

"She is under my protection. I decline to give her up."

The man saluted.

"Well," said Rupert, "what do you propose to do?"

"Follow my instructions."

"Do those instructions extend to the shedding of blood?"

The sergeant hesitated.

"Look here, my man," said Rupert, changing his tone and speaking with a frank persuasiveness difficult to resist, "this is not a matter of military duty. It is a private quarrel between your colonel and myself. If he wants satisfaction at my hands

I am ready to give it. But I warn you that if you attempt to force your way into the presence of the baroness, my servant and I will do our best to prevent you. We have arms, as you see," opening his coat, "and we know how to use them. Lives may be lost and you will be held responsible. Are you ready to take the risk?"

The sergeant looked puzzled.

"A soldier, *mein Herr*, has only one duty—to obey orders."

"When he knows what those orders are," retorted Rupert. "But you don't seem certain. Don't you think you had better go back and find out?"

A pause, while the sergeant pondered, and Rupert leant coolly against the door-post, determination written in every line of his handsome face. Perhaps that attitude of silent resolution helped the former to make up his mind. Crossing the courtyard, he said a few words in a low voice to one of the men, then returned to Rupert.

"*Mein Herr*," he said, "your advice is good; I will follow it. But I will leave two of my fellows here to see that nothing goes wrong in my absence."

Rupert bit his lip. He felt for the moment that the sergeant had outwitted him. But he recovered himself promptly, helped by the look of good-humoured amusement on the latter's face.

"You will do as you please," he replied with affected indifference, and turned into the inn.

A word of command, a clatter of arms, and the soldiers marched away down the road, followed by muttered execrations and glances of unconcealed dislike from the Italian population, to whom their uniform was a thing accursed. Celia's maid leant out of the window.

"They are gone, madame," she exclaimed. "The signore has sent them away."

"Not all, unfortunately," said Rupert, re-entering the room. "Two spies remain below. But we will dodge them yet. I have spoken to the landlord, Celia; he will do anything to spite an Austrian. Besides, I have made it worth his while. He will take them out a couple of bottles of Chianti, and while they are thus employed you will slip out quietly by the back door and make your way to the cross roads; a carriage, with a trusty driver, will meet you there, and at your first stopping place you will be

joined by Grant and the maid. I dare not take you myself. I must stay here to baffle suspicion. But the landlord's wife will go with you as far as the carriage. Will this do?"

"Do!" she uttered, holding out her hand. "God bless and reward you, Rupert, for all your kindness."

He stooped and kissed it in silence. That lovely upturned face, those tearful eyes had nearly proved fatal to his self-control. But honour prevailed. She had trusted him, and a Carew had never yet been unfaithful to his word.

* * * * *

Falkenberg Castle stands on a wooded height in the heart of the Austrian Tyrol. The scenery around is wild and romantic; the people in harmony with their land. In the eyes of the Tyrolese peasant every woman is a queen, and Celia's sad heart was cheered by the chivalrous courtesy she encountered whenever she ventured abroad. In spite of her hostess's kindness the days dragged wearily by while she watched and waited, wondering what would be the upshot of it all. Her husband was not the sort of man to sit down tamely under a sense of injury. Rupert had defied him, and would have to answer for it. Had she done wisely in seeking his protection? At the time she had not stopped to think, had seized in her terror on the first means of escape that presented itself. But now, in her calmer moments, she felt that it might have been better to endure the baron's brutality to the end than to expose her old friend to danger on her account.

She was musing thus sadly, one evening, standing by the window, watching the shades of night descend on the valley beneath her, and the lingering glow on the mountain crests above, when the door opened softly behind her and Rupert Carew came into the room.

"Celia!" he said.

She turned round with a little cry.

"Rupert!"

And then she stopped short.

"You bring me news."

"I do," he answered. "I come to tell you that you are free."

"But not by your hand?" shrinking back. "Oh, Rupert! you did not kill him?"

"No, Celia," gravely. "He died by the visitation of God."

She clasped her hands and her lips moved in silent prayer.

"Tell me about it," she murmured presently, and he obeyed.

"We met. I contented myself at first with standing on the defensive. I had no wish to hurt him. But he rushed at me with such savage fury that I was forced to alter my tactics. Suddenly a change passed over his face ; his sword dropped from his grasp and he fell heavily to the ground. The seconds rushed in ; there was not a sign of a wound anywhere, but his face was blue and swollen, and his tongue hung out of his mouth. We carried him to the nearest inn, and the doctor did what he could for him, but he never spoke again. It was a fit brought on by the violence of his passions."

She covered her face with her hands, and for a while there was silence between them.

"To rush like that into the presence of his Maker," said Celia at last, "and all through me !"

"You must not blame yourself," said Rupert kindly. "Your life was a daily martyrdom. You bore it as long as you could."

"I did indeed," she answered. "Oh, Rupert, you cannot guess one half what I endured !"

"Forget it," he urged, bending forward and taking possession of her hand. "Forget it and look towards the future. Remember him only in your prayers."

* * * * *

When the year of her widowhood had expired, Celia Von Redwitz gave her hand and her heart to the man who had ventured his life in her cause. She insisted on waiting thus long to show respect at least for the memory of the man she had been unable to love. She came to her husband empty-handed, save for her own small dowry, for though by the baron's death she had come into possession of money and lands, neither she nor Rupert cared to profit by his riches. They returned to his own relations, who, needless to say, were nothing loth. The marriage took place at Falkenberg Castle. Falkenberg performed the part of best man, and wiped a furtive tear from his eye as the carriage rolled away. He had long cherished a deep and hopeless attachment for his late colonel's wife, so well concealed that neither Rupert nor Celia ever guessed its existence.

* * * * *

One more scene and I have done. The setting sun streams down on the flowery banks of a Devonshire lane, on a travelling carriage slowly toiling up the steep. Inside it, two happy young people, bridegroom and bride. She lets down the window and inhales with delight her native air.

"Ah, Rupert," she exclaims, "there is nothing like England after all. I wish I had never left it."

He looks at her anxiously.

"No, don't be afraid. The past is gone; it is lost in the happy present. Only it seems a pity to have wasted all that time we might have spent together."

But even this regret fades from her mind as he draws her fondly to his side and whispers that past sorrow enhances present joy, and that every pang he endured on her account has only endeared her the more.

A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," THE
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ROSE IS BAFFLING."

"I AM going up to town to-morrow on business. Can I take anything or any message for you to Belle?"

Arthur Stanmer said this to Mrs. Warrener when he was walking back to the Rectory with her after the Sunday morning service. She smiled inwardly at the transparency of his motive in offering to undertake the task which the parcels post and telegraph office performed more expeditiously and unflinchingly. But at the same time she was glad to find that he was actuated by that motive.

"Belle will have a welcome for you without any message or parcel from me. Send her a wire beforehand to say you're coming. My sister takes her out a good deal, and she would be sorry to miss you."

"Perhaps she won't thank me for interfering with any of her amusements," he said with half irritation and half hopefulness that what he suggested was not the case. "My wire may keep her from some concert, or flower show, or picture gallery or something. My mother tells me that you say she has hardly an hour to herself."

"No one ever has in Mrs. Gould's house," Mrs. Warrener laughed cheerfully. "My sister is one of those excellent women who go through life with too much labour that they love on their hands. Religion is a pleasure to her which she practises arduously but cheerfully. Pleasure is a business to her which she practises equally arduously, but not with equal pleasure, so she assures every one. But she is a conscientious mother, and performs all the social duties which come in her way unflinchingly. Just now she is busy preparing her youngest daughter's *trousseau*, and Belle does the shopping with her because her taste helps. She has designed and drawn out the bride's wedding and travelling dresses, the bridesmaids' dresses, and Mrs. Gould's. Besides this Belle

has an unerring eye for subtle contrasts and delicate harmonies. You mustn't think because I told your mother that she has hardly an hour to herself that she is frivolling her time away."

"I should never have thought that of her," he said gravely, and he did not add that his mother had done all in her power to induce him to think it. There was something that nearly approached vindictiveness in Mrs. Stanmer's heart towards this girl, whose sole offence against her was that she had won the love of Mrs. Stanmer's son.

There was not much geniality at the Dene Prior early Sunday dinner table this day. Mrs. Stanmer was annoyed that Arthur should go up to town while Belle was there, and Rose Davenport at Dene Prior. Arthur very seldom was moved by the spirit to visit London unless he was dragged there on escort duty by his mother. There was no possible reason that she could imagine to take him up there now unless it was to see Belle. And that he should leave Miss Davenport for a whole day for the sake of seeing a girl his mother did not want him to see was the cause of much fear and fret in Mrs. Stanmer's mind.

"I wanted you to take Rose on the river to-morrow, Arthur; the water lilies on the back water just above the Kelso's cottage must be looking lovely now," Mrs. Stanmer said complainingly.

"I should have been delighted if I hadn't been obliged to run up to town."

"What obliges you?"

"Business," he said curtly.

"I have no doubt the water-lilies will kindly keep in bloom a few days longer and let me see them if Mr. Stanmer can take me on the river later in the week," Miss Davenport put in cheerfully. She knew as well as if Mrs. Stanmer had told her so that she had been had down to ensnare or enthrall the affections of the master of the house, and after the first sight she had of him she was perfectly resigned to attempting the task. But up to the present time she was conscious that her efforts had not been crowned with success. He was a delightful host, but if she had been her own grandmother he could not have been less lover-like in his manner towards her.

It was rather hard on the girl that his indifference should have been so manipulated by his mother into meaning "attention" as to leave no doubt in her (Rose's) mind as to the old lady's wishes

on the subject. There had never been a hint given by Mrs. Stanmer as to her son's infatuation for Belle Warrener, but having discovered from some other source that there was a daughter at the Rectory, jealous intuition told Rose that the girl whose name was never mentioned at Dene Prior was her rival.

"Go out and see the last of him, my dear," Mrs. Stanmer said the next day, when Arthur looked into the morning room to say a brief good-bye.

"I can see the start from this window," Rose replied, turning red as her name. It mortified her that his mother should pay these little attentions for her son. If Arthur had even looked a suggestion of her accompanying him to the entrance door to see him get into his dog-cart she would have gone gladly enough. As it was he had only looked cheerfully impatient to be off, and the slight compliment which he had omitted to pay grated on her when Mrs. Stanmer offered her substitute.

"Poor boy, he will be disappointed if you let him go without a parting word, just as if his absence for the whole day were a matter of perfect indifference to you."

"It's a matter of perfect indifference to him whether I observe his absence or not," Rose said, pettishly. "And I would rather not be driven into boring him by a display of interest which he doesn't desire me to feel."

"Arthur is not a demonstrative man, neither was his dear father. But they are alike in this, their feelings once deeply stirred are unchangeable."

"Who has been fortunate enough to stir these unchangeable feelings?"

"It would be premature of me to say what *you* affect not to know yet."

Rose drew her head up slightly with a little inimitable gesture of proud self-respect and dignity.

"I am not addicted to prying into other people's affairs," she said quietly; "I see—I should be blind if I did not—that Mr. Stanmer is very much absorbed by some tender thoughts and feelings that are outside his life here at the present time. I hear—I should be deaf if I didn't—that there is a very dear daughter at the Rectory who is likely to be a very dear daughter to you some day."

In spite of Mrs. Stanmer's anger at these words she could not

look with anything but pride and gratification at the one who spoke them. Miss Davenport's liking for Arthur Stanmer, though never expressed by word or action, was an open secret to his mother. Her graceful beauty always seemed to wake into fuller sweeter life when he was present, and there was an unmistakable atmosphere of shy happiness about her whenever he voluntarily sought her out and gave himself up to the task of making the hours pleasant to her, that revealed the truth to the experienced woman of the world. This rich, quietly graceful girl, on whom refinement was visibly stamped, was undoubtedly very well inclined to love Arthur, and she would be exactly the daughter-in-law in whom Mrs. Stanmer's "heart would rejoice." So at least the elder lady thought now. There was everything about Rose that Mrs. Stanmer best liked in young womanhood. Wealth, beauty, grace, refinement. No obnoxiously fast or poor relations. No overpoweringly high spirits such as might lead her to jump over a hedge and exhibit her ankles to the curious. No "craving for excitement" such as possessed that restless Belle Warrener. Rose Davenport would go through life without making herself remarkable for anything but tact, beauty and good breeding, Mrs. Stanmer was convinced. Why was Arthur so blind to her attractions, and why had he gone up to town on some frivolous pretext while Belle Warrener was there? Her maternal spirit yearned over the restful-mannered, shy-eyed beauty who always behaved like an unassertive queen. Unconsciously Mrs. Stanmer allowed herself to luxuriate in the belief that if Arthur made Rose his wife the latter would remain in her placidly regal state and permit her mother-in-law to still hold the reins of household government. This being the case Mrs. Stanmer felt that she was being treated unjustly by Rose when the latter, in her soft equable tones, referred to Belle Warrener and the possibility of the latter bringing her restless hoydenish ways with authority to Dene Prior.

"Likely to be a dear daughter to me some day! My dear Rose, who has dared to gossip to you about that idiotic long ago dead and buried local rumour?"

"Neither dead nor buried," Rose said with a soft laugh, that concealed some bitterly disappointed feeling. "So much alive that I have met with it at very close quarters. Last evening when you made Mr. Stanmer take me round the rose-garden

I asked him if Miss Warrener was as dear and true and sweet as some of the people about here have been telling me that she is. And he said: 'She is dearer and truer and sweeter than any one who knows her less well than I do can say.'

"*Arthur* said that? *Arthur* said that to you?"

"Mr. Stanmer said that to me most distinctly," Rose said in the musical unexcitable tones that were so dear to Mrs. Stanmer's taste. "It was so nice of him not to resent my blundering into an allusion to a matter about which he is not at all sure himself, for he tells me he is very uncertain as to how Miss Warrener will receive him to-day."

"He is going to see that girl?"

"He is going to call on Miss Warrener."

"Her going away was merely a lure to make him more anxious to see her and draw him after her. She has played on his pride by making him believe that she retreats because I object to her. Naturally a young man of spirit would object to having the imputation of being ruled by his mother in such a matter cast upon him. She has played her crafty, cunning game to win him cleverly."

"Then you think—you know that she has won him?"

There was not an atom of reproach in Miss Davenport's look, tone or manner. But Mrs. Stanmer knew when her young friend said these words that she felt she had been tricked and deceived, not by *Arthur*, but by his mother.

"I know nothing of the kind," Mrs. Stanmer said less languidly than usual. "I say that she has to a certain extent played her crafty, cunning game cleverly! But I am far from saying that she has played it successfully."

"Crafty and cunning are strong words. What has she done that you should use them about her?"

Now this was a question which it would have been extremely repugnant to Mrs. Stanmer's taste to answer veraciously. Back in those halcyon days when she had been a fair and extremely fascinating woman, little Belle Warrener had unintentionally raised a laugh at her expense by asking, "Why Mrs. Stanmer always played at being ill at her garden parties, when she was quite well before they began and as soon as they were over?" The child had asked the socially unanswerable question, because she had observed that at these functions Mrs. Stanmer had a

habit of enthroning herself in an invalid's chair under a becoming awning and languidly receiving her guests with the air of a suffering but still gracious royal personage. People on whom Mrs. Stanmer's airs and graces and well-made clothes made a subduing impression, spoke with something like awed admiration of the "sweet woman's charming unselfishness" in asking her friends to come and enjoy the gardens and lake and other lovelinesses of Dene Prior, to eat strawberries and cream and drink iced coffee and champagne cup, while she herself seemed condemned to recline like an indisposed fashion-plate in her throne upon wheels. Until Belle asked the question no one had been indiscreet enough to suggest that there was anything approaching to affectation in the arrangement. But when Belle thirsted for information on the subject a few profane ones grew mirthful and less reverential than before, and Belle's remark grew and prospered, and was widely quoted by every one whom Mrs. Stanmer had snubbed in the course of her lady-like career, and the name of these latter was legion. Mrs. Stanmer would not for wealth untold have had it supposed that the unconscious sarcasm of a little child had the power to sting her. But she had been stung, and she had never forgiven Belle. So now when Rose Davenport asked what Belle had done that the epithets crafty and cunning should be applied to her, Mrs. Stanmer wavered for a few moments between her desire to have Belle's blood and her deep-rooted aversion to avowing the real reason why she did so.

"She used in her silly, boisterous way to laugh at people behind their backs, and try to turn those who had been good friends to her father when he was less well off than he is now (the money is the second wife's, you must know) into ridicule. I happened to discover this most unamiable habit of hers, and injudiciously I spoke to Arthur about it, and expressed a severely condemnatory opinion about the girl. This roused a spirit of opposition in him—the best of sons and men don't like to appear to be led by their mothers. So instead of being cool to Miss Warrener he tried to make up to her for my want of warmth for a time. But *only* for a time. He has *quite* ceased to seek her either in her own home or when they meet in society now."

"He is going to seek her to-day," Rose said quietly.

"I have no doubt her step-mother asked him to call; he

walked back to the Rectory after the morning service with Mrs. Warrener, I know, A most managing match-making woman that Mrs. Warrener. She would do all in her power to throw Belle in his way."

"He told me that Mrs. Warrener wouldn't give him either a message or a parcel as an excuse for his calling on her daughter."

"Oh, indeed, that was only to make him the more determined on doing it. I detest intriguing women."

"So do I. It's so foolish to attempt to interfere between two people who are fond of one another."

Miss Davenport said this with such candour and simplicity that Mrs. Stanmer was puzzled as to whether the remark was intended to apply to her or to Mrs. Warrener. Accordingly, she let it pass uncommented upon, and started another topic by saying :

"In Arthur's absence, having no better amusement to offer you, my dear, I will show you the Stanmer collection of mosaics and intaglios and historical gold and silver plate, which is really unique. In my dear husband's time we used the gold plate constantly, as we entertained a great deal."

"You used it for other people's pleasure more than your own, then? If I had gold plate I should use it every day."

Mrs. Stanmer lifted her eye-brows a hair's-breadth at this declaration.

"It would savour rather of ostentation to use it daily, don't you think?" she asked.

"Indeed, I shouldn't care what it savoured of, I should use it daily for my own pleasure," Rose said with the peculiarly sweetly resolute air that was one of her greatest charms, and which she brought to bear with equal weight on the most trifling as well as the most momentous questions.

"Whatever you did would be sure to seem the right thing to do, my dear child," Mrs. Stanmer said affectionately. But in her innermost heart she felt that if Rose used the historical gold plate, which had been buried on the Dene Prior estate when Charles the First lost his crown and head, and was only discovered and dug up again in the days of Arthur Stanmer's great-uncle, the "county" would smile.

"Rose is baffling, but *very* sweet," Mrs. Stanmer said to herself

While his mother was fighting his battle (which he did not want to win) for him, Arthur Stanmer had run up by express to Victoria, and after transacting some saddlery business at the Army and Navy Stores, had jumped into a hansom and driven over to Blessington Terrace.

He had not taken the precaution of sending a wire to Belle announcing his approach, as her step-mother had advised him to do. Important as the matter was on which he had come to speak about to her—nothing less than asking her to marry him—he had left it to chance to find her at home.

As his hansom dashed round a corner on to the terrace, he saw that chance was his friend this day. There was Belle standing on the pavement about twenty yards ahead of him. The joy the sight gave him dazzled his vision for an instant. The next, his eyes were cleared, joy fled! for Belle was talking earnestly, "intimately" it appeared to Arthur Stanmer, to the smart, dashing, handsome fellow who "travelled" for a wine merchant's firm as "our Mr. Ogilvie."

The spectacle of Belle in close conversation with the smart, showy, good-looking fellow whom Stanmer felt sure in his own mind was identical with the tramp who had first traded on Belle's charity and then insulted her, was an appalling one to the man who was on his way to ask her to be his wife. Without giving himself time to think how much more reasonable it would be on his part to ask for an explanation of the apparently criminal circumstance, he gave a hasty order to be driven at once to his club. So all Belle saw of him that day was his fierce, reproachful face as the hansom dashed by.

She knew how horribly appearances were against her; and as she knew herself to be innocent of all faultiness or even folly in the present matter, she said to herself in her wrath that Arthur Stanmer was "a fool and a cruel one for acting in such a condemnatory and precipitate manner." As a matter of fact, she had not been in Ogilvie's company for five minutes. On her way home from a fatiguing round of shopping she had lighted upon him here in the terrace, within a dozen yards of Mrs. Gould's house. That he had been waiting to waylay her she felt intuitively, but she was at a loss to conceive when he had obtained information as to her whereabouts and doings. Her feeling of repulsion prompted her to pass on with the slightest

inclination of which the female head is capable. But he doffed his hat low, stood direct in her path and said :

“Miss Warrener, pardon me ; but I must speak to you on a matter that is one of life and death to me. When and where can I see Sylvia? You must help me to an interview with her.”

Before her answer is read, the effect of her (apparent) light conduct on Arthur Stanmer must be traced for a brief period.

He was a man of strong, deep feeling, and he had loved Belle Warrener from the day he had first learnt the lesson of loving in a manly way. Her bright, high spirit and intense power of enjoying every healthy amusement had enlivened and brightened his more sombre spirit. He had been more amused than annoyed when his mother had spoken of Belle as a “tomboy,” until that unfortunate incident of the handsome tramp had occurred. After that, it made him wince whenever he thought of her jumping over a hedge, or running about in the water meadow to exercise her dogs. But though he still winced when he recalled this incident, he had up to this day trained himself admirably into the belief that she had been guilty of nothing worse than a piece of generous imprudence, which was quite in keeping with her generously imprudent character. But now that he saw her under the very shadow of her deceived hostess’s house in close and intimate (so it appeared) conversation with the man whom he unhesitatingly denounced as “a scoundrel,” all his doubts of her arose in stronger force than ever.

He was a good-looking man himself, but he had never been one to pride himself upon his good personal appearance, or to take much heed of it. This day, however, he felt with a pang that in the matter of good looks and fine physique this obnoxious man had the advantage of him. He smiled sneeringly at his own weakness in being hurt by this conviction. But the conviction was there, and he was hurt by it. He tried to cure himself of the folly of feeling this horrible pain by declaring to himself that “a woman who was a slave to the lust of the eye wasn’t worth a tinker’s curse.” But he was not a tinker, and in spite of the fall she had given to his love and pride, he blessed her heartily instead of cursing her. He even tried to be satirical about himself and her, but the satire fell flat when he thought anything original, and rang false when he lapsed into quotation. There were some lines which had been written by a jovial little

friend of his, who had written and composed them on the occasion of his sixth disappointment before he had been "able to inter her memory," as he phrased it. They were addressed to Pyrrha—the lady's name had been Matilda, but Pyrrha sounded better—and they were as sweetly-bitter as a crab-apple. Arthur remembered that he had laughed at them, though he liked their rhythm and the music to which they were set, when he heard them first. But he remembered some of them now, and repeated them to himself silently, and fancied they fitted his case :

"And I who once aspired to sail
 Upon that summer sea,
 Whose brightest hope was only this :
 To love and live for thee.
 My votive offering now I place
 On some far worthier shrine,
 Rejoicing that those treach'rous waves
 Wreck other barques than mine."

After all, though, perhaps, she was not going to wreck that other barque, nor could Arthur Stanmer bring himself down to the level of the meanness of wishing that she might do so. But oh! how miserable he was, poor fellow, as he drove along, misjudging her and feeling that the one dear thing the world held for him was ebbing away.

If he could only have heard Ogilvie saying : "Miss Warrener, pardon me ; but I must speak to you on a matter that is one of life and death to me. When and where can I see Sylvia ? You must help me to an interview with her."

CHAPTER IX.

SUSPECTED ANN.

BELLE stopped sharply, feeling as if she had been shot. That this stranger should dare to arrest her progress in this way, by making familiar mention of the girl whose wedding dress she (Belle) had seen tried on an hour ago horrified her.

But was he such a "stranger" after all? In the height of her anger against him, this subduing suspicion seized upon and wrung her spirit into subjection. Rather, ten thousand times rather, would she have tackled him as an insolent, underbred stranger, presuming on a mere chance acquaintance, than have

to face in him what she was gruesomely convinced he was—a development of Dick the Tramp.

Every nerve in her body was thrilling with fright, but she showed no outside sign of decrepitude. On the contrary, she managed to infuse a fair amount of dignified defiance into her tone and manner as she said :

“It is impossible that I can discuss Miss Gould or anything concerning her, with you either now or at any other time, Mr. Ogilvie.”

“But you *must* now—or whenever and wherever I please, for your own sake, Miss Warrener. Come! Confess that your memory is not as bad as you would have me believe? You have not forgotten the Rectory back lane, the water meadow and cattle shed, the broken meats and bottles of Bass you brought me with sweet surreptitious charity from your father’s larder, while I was developing your histrionic instincts by playing the part of ‘Dick the Tramp’!”

His handsome face lighted up with fun and mischief as he spoke, there was no malice in his move.

“What a good actor you are, how you must have laughed while you were taking me in.” Then she remembered the way he had caught her in his arms and kissed her, and again a feeling of deadly antagonism mixed with fear arrayed itself in her mind against him.

“I was in very low water at the time, besides you were awfully fresh and amusing, and if I had let you suspect I was a gentleman, you would never have come near me a second time. As it was, you treated me as you would have treated a lame dog or a pariah and outcast, and I was a brute and frightened you in return.”

“Ah! Don’t—don’t!” she said. The very memory of the way in which he had frightened her was revolting.

“I thought you would have known I was only doing a bit from my great scene in ‘Dick the Tramp,’ but evidently my fame hadn’t reached Prior Common—;” and while he was thus explaining himself, Arthur Stanmer’s hansom dashed by.

“Unexpected and—unlucky!” Mr. Dick Ogilvie remarked drily as Belle gave vent to an exclamation that began with a note of joy and tailed off into a wail of disappointment. “Don’t be afraid, Miss Warrener, the gentle tassel will come back before

long, and then (see how I trust you) you may tell him I was only begging for your interest to get me a few words with Sylvia Gould."

"You shall never get them through me," Belle said vehemently; "you are a wretch to want to see her and make her miserable now that she is going to be married."

"A 'wretch' whom she loves, remember."

There was something like dignity in the man's manner as he said this. The threatening and mockingly mischievous manners were both banished. Belle was impressed for a moment, then she remembered he was an actor. She shook her head vigorously and walked on.

"You had better help me to see her before she marries. If you don't I shall do it after. I am in earnest this time, Miss Warrener."

As far as gaining his purpose was concerned, the taunt was an unfortunate one. It roused the spirit of resentment in Belle and made her for the moment defiantly careless of consequences.

"I shall go straight in and tell Mrs. Gould and Mr. Christopher the whole story, they will save her from your persecutions."

She faced round on him with a fire in her eyes as fierce and bright as the one that burned in his own. Spirit in whatever form it was shown, appealed to him powerfully. He veered round again, being as inconstant, fickle, fierce and vain as men of no moral and religious principle and strong passions generally are. He veered round again and felt a warmer admiration for her for the moment than had ever thrilled him about Sylvia Gould. The instantaneous change of expression in his eyes betrayed this, and Belle, smarting with a sense of being insulted, sprang up the steps and plied the knocker vigorously without giving him another look or word.

"The *brute!* This is the second time he has cost me Arthur Stanmer," she sobbed with dry eyes as she tried to reduce herself to the state of lady-like calm that would befit Mrs. Gould's luncheon table. It was too awfully cruel that she should be punished in this way for having been kind and charitable to a fellow-creature, whom she had believed to be in dire distress. How he must have laughed at her all the time? She began to wonder which was the worst she would have to endure from him? His love, or his hatred, or his ridicule? All three might be mere

pretence, acting, humbug, indulged in by a clever scoundrel at the expense of a girl whom he had deceived and deluded and—disgraced. The words she used about herself infuriated her as much as they sickened her, and the wretch who had caused her these sensations had cost her Arthur Stanmer twice!

“Such a morning as we have had!” Mrs. Gould began a little garrulously when she came in (late) and sat down to luncheon. “I never gave so much anxious thought, time and attention to my own clothes during the whole course of my life, Sylvia, as I am giving to yours. Belle has been a dear helpful girl!” (Belle had done all the selecting, harmonizing and managing); “but of course the whole responsibility rests on me, and if the *trousseau* turns out a press success, you will have your mother to thank for it, Sylvia. I have been most careful to get everything from people with the *best* names, and——. What’s the matter, Sylvia?”

Between laughing and crying Sylvia lifted her eyes from the plate on which she had been playing with its contents, in a manner that was most unflattering to Mrs. Gould’s excellent cook. She sent a quick glance round the room—saw that the parlour-maid was not there, and said:

“The bridegroom ought to have come from ‘one of the best houses’ too, mother, to match the *trousseau*.”

“Sylvia!”

Mrs. Gould said only that one word, but the way in which she said it reminded Sylvia of so many things which she had momentarily forgotten. Among others of how unflinchingly her mother had always pursued the round of mere worldly pleasures! even occasionally to the paring of the paths of piety—for the sake of her daughters. A proper appreciation of Mr. Christopher was the best return in grateful kind which she could make to her mother. She would seem to make it. She “would,” poor little soul. How she gulped over her good intention, for her roving, restless gaze had naughtily fallen on Dick Ogilvie from her bedroom window as he stood on the pavement pleading his cause and hers, she felt sure, with Belle Warrener.

“Mr. Christopher is very good, I know that; and I know I’m a very lucky girl to have caught——.”

“A very *fortunate* girl, Sylvia, to have *won* such a man!” Mrs. Gould interposed, her best air of graceful piety, and of being ready to unfurl her high standard turned on instantly.

"And to have such jewellery as he is going to give you!" Lily murmured, looking up plaintively from the negotiation of a rissole in which there was too distinctly a dominating flavour of onion to please her. "Mr. Christopher called while you were all out this morning and showed me patterns of a sapphire and diamond set he is having made for you, Sylvia. He tried the bracelet on my arm. It looked lovely!"

Sylvia sniffed. Mrs. Gould looked at her daughters dispassionately.

"There is no fear of it being too small for you, Sylvia, for Lily's arm is the better rounded of the two. But if it comes to rings——"

"Mr. Christopher would never think of trying on rings to fingers that were not meant for them." Lily withdrew her attention from the too highly flavoured rissole as she spoke, and looked at her mother with large clear eyes. "He measured mine for the bridesmaid's ring this morning. Yours and mine will match, Belle; and I said they might be the same size."

"How thoughtful he is to come and attend to all these minor details himself." Mrs. Gould heaved a sigh of repletion and contentment. She was very much pleased with her future son-in-law for ordering the bridesmaids' rings, in addition to the emerald bracelets with which he had already presented them. Emeralds suited Lily's lily-fairness admirably well. For a moment or two she permitted herself to wish that it was the fashion for the bridegroom to make rich gifts to the bride's mother. However, she quickly exorcised the demon of acquisitiveness as far as she was personally concerned, and only permitted herself to indulge in the maternal hope that Lily would benefit to a still larger extent by her rich brother-in-law's taste for jewellery.

"Mr. Christopher is very fond of jewels," Sylvia remarked, addressing no one in particular; "he has almost a savage love of them, he likes them large and flashy, like the barbaric gems in the Maharajah's turban. I feel sure, in a little time, that he will hang one from my nose and attach a massive gold chain to it, and lead me about so that all men may know that the little gem-encrusted woman belongs to him."

"You don't wish to have it supposed that you don't belong to him, I suppose!"

"No, indeed, Lily; I have quite done with beautiful dreams and vaulting ambition."

"I am glad you have such a well-balanced mind, that you are not letting your head be turned by the dazzling prospect that is before you," Mrs. Gould said affectionately. "It has always offended my taste," she went on, addressing Belle more especially, "when I have seen engaged girls making a parade of their happiness, as if no one had ever been engaged or married before them."

"I haven't made much of a parade of mine," Sylvia laughed, as she rose from the table and went to the window. "Why mamma! What can this mean? Here comes Mr. Christopher with a policeman!"

"Perhaps he may have heard something about the ring you lost that day you washed Bubble and Squeak in the bath," Lily was saying when Mr. Christopher—his under-lip protruding more obnoxiously than ever—walked into the room.

"I have discovered the sapphire and diamond ring which I gave Sylvia and which she was unfortunate enough to lose," he began, with about as much animation as a hippopotamus would have evinced under the circumstances.

"Have you? how delightfully fortunate; poor Sylvia has *grieved* so for the loss and about the omen," Mrs. Gould cried sympathetically, while Sylvia inquired:

"Where did you find it? in a sewer?"

"In Melling's shop, in Combermere Street," he said stiffly, and they gave him a more startled attention than they had given him before, for Melling was the working jeweller to whom they sent their watches when these latter stopped, and their rings and bracelets when they were broken.

"In Melling's shop!" Mrs. Gould ejaculated.

"I hope we shall find out who took it there," Sylvia said excitedly. She was quite girlish enough to be delighted at the prospect of recovering her valuable ring, and quite human enough to long to have the wrong-doer who had disposed of it to Melling punished. But a new complexion was put upon the affair when Mr. Christopher said:

"From Melling's description of the person from whom he purchased the ring, I very much fear that Sylvia has been slain by a shaft drawn from her own wing, in other words, that the thief is a member of your own household."

"Mr. Christopher!"

"My dear madam, I fear it very much indeed. I have a constable with me now, who will request your servant Ann to accompany him to Melling's shop. Mr. Melling is unprepared for the visit. I have not given him the slightest hint of my suspicions; but if they are well grounded, I fancy he will immediately identify Ann as the person who sold him Sylvia's ring."

"Ridiculous! She's as honest as any one of us, and she's devoted to me," Sylvia cried warmly. "You might as well accuse me of having stolen my own ring, as think that Ann has taken it!"

"Where did you get her from?" Mr. Christopher asked judicially.

"She was highly recommended to me by the lady with whom Sylvia stayed for twelve months before I settled in England."

"You could rely on this lady's recommendation?"

"Certainly mother could rely on Mrs. Ogilvie's recommendation! She's one of the dearest old ladies in the world! *quite* a lady, though she does keep a boarding-house," Sylvia said hotly.

Mr. Christopher's under-lip protruded still more ominously, until it resembled a dripping-pan.

"London boarding-house keepers are proverbially unscrupulous and unprincipled," he said harshly, and there was a momentary lull in the conversation, during which Sylvia was condemned to the hard labour of trying to keep back her tears of wrath at hearing such epithets applied to Dick's mother.

"I cannot believe that Ann is the person who sold the ring to Melling. The very fact of its being taken to a shop at which we deal, points to a stranger, not to a member of our household," Mrs. Gould said anxiously. She had a nice woman's deeply-rooted aversion to finding out any one whom she liked and trusted. Still she preferred finding Ann out to laying herself open to her future son-in-law's ponderous displeasure. Accordingly she rang the bell and gave the order for Ann to be summoned, and as she did so, her daughter Sylvia took the opportunity of slipping out of the room.

"I hope Sylvia is not going to put the woman on her guard!" Mr. Christopher said suspiciously.

"Oh, dear no! Why should she? The poor child is naturally

agitated at what you have just told us ; she has been very much distressed at the loss of her ring, not so much on account of its intrinsic value, but because it was *your* gift, you know," Mrs. Gould put in, with the maternally merciful design of saving Sylvia from a pre-nuptial wiggling.

"I think Sylvia would have been sorry to lose her sapphire and diamond ring, whoever had given it to her. I don't see why one should pretend to underrate a gift for the sake of flattering up the giver."

"At least you are too honest to 'flatter,' Lily," Mr. Christopher said solemnly, and Lily replied :

"I don't know about being 'too honest' to do it, Sylvia's ever so much honestier than I am ; she has never pretended to care tuppence for the ring on account of your having given it to her. She liked it just as I did, because the sapphire was so big and so blue, and the diamonds were real brilliants."

"I must request that you ring and order your trusty servant Ann down again immediately," Mr. Christopher said gloomily, turning to Mrs. Gould, and that lady did as he bid her with a trembling hand and voice.

CHAPTER X.

A TRUSTY SERVANT.

SYLVIA had followed so quickly upon the heels of the bearer of the command for Ann "to come down at once," that the woman **had not had** time to regain her self-control before her young mistress **burst into the room.**

"Wanted to go with a **policeman** ? What for, indeed ? Does Mrs. Gould think I've got any of her **electro-plate in my boxes** ? If she does, let her policeman come up and search them, but go down I shan't, unless I'm dragged down."

These words—or at least a portion of them—delivered in a voice that was shrill and shaky with fury, fell on Sylvia's ears as she rushed into the room. The parlour-maid stood by the door adding fuel to the fire of Ann's wrath by uttering such phrases as : "Well, I don't wonder you feel it, Ann ! to have a policeman brought to the house as if we was all common thieves, and then you sent for like this. I heard a word or two as I closed the dining-room door, and it's about Miss Sylvia's ring that you're——."

The stream of her stingingly sympathetic eloquence was checked by Sylvia's entrance.

"Go down, go down at once," the girl said impatiently, "and don't chatter. It's all a mistake, I'm sure, Ann. I've come up to tell you I feel sure it's all a mistake."

"What's all a mistake?" Ann faced round fiercely as she spoke, and shook off the kind, confiding hand which Sylvia had laid upon her arm roughly. Now that she was strung up with excitement and rage, it was to be seen that the confidential servant was a good-looking woman, must have been a handsome one indeed at no very remote period. Hers was a dark swarthy strong face, the straight but rather blunt and full features of which were lighted up by a pair of dark brown eyes. Her figure was fairly good, and would have been a fine and graceful one had she been cleverly corsetted and dressed. As it was, though she had not called in the costumier's art, she held herself trimly and well, and her dress and *coiffure* were the very perfection of neatness.

"What's all a mistake?" she asked fiercely, and Sylvia was staggered into saying :

"Saying that you took my sapphire ring and sold it to Melling, in Combermere Street."

"Who is Melling, in Combermere Street?" the woman asked blankly.

"A working jeweller who mends our things. There! I said it couldn't have been you who took my ring there, and I was right! you don't even know who he is, and where he lives," Sylvia cried with triumphant confidence, and just then the second order for Ann's appearance below was shot into the room by the parlour-maid, who "felt it all, very much" she declared, but who would not have curtailed a bit of the sport for the price even of the little country hostelry, "an hour from Charing Cross," which her young man and herself had their respective eyes upon for their Arcadia when they married.

Ann stood wavering for a moment or two. A high colour came into her swarthy face, a fierce light gleamed in her dark eyes.

"You won't turn against me, Miss Sylvia, will you? even if by their lies they do make me out a thief. Dick Ogilvie won't think much of you any more, if you turn against me now!"

"Speak more respectfully of Mr. Ogilvie," Sylvia said coldly. A sudden alarm had taken possession of her. This woman!—

this trusted confidential servant of theirs, was suddenly assuming an air of equality on the ground of Dick Ogilvie, that very much offended the young lady who had stooped to love Dick.

"*Respectfully* of him!" Ann muttered scornfully as she went down to meet her accusers. "It's through him—it's all for him, Miss Sylvia, that both you and I will be sorry enough that ring has ever been found, before the business is done with."

Then she went downstairs doggedly, and without a moment's hesitation, agreed to go round to Melling's shop with Mr. Christopher and the policeman.

"Belle," Sylvia whispered, as the trio went out of the house presently, "I wish we had never seen Ann, or the sapphire ring, or—Mr. Christopher."

The confidential servant had dressed herself with most perfect propriety for the unpleasant expedition. There was a touch of the faithful old domestic primness and sobriety in the plain, full-skirted grey dress, capacious black mantle and black bonnet that encircled her with quaker-like demureness. Her hair was banded very plainly well over her ears in the most respectable and unbecoming way that the art of the hairdresser has ever devised, and she sought no softening aid from the kind intervention of a veil. She stooped dejectedly as she walked along with her compromising escort, and seemed to have grown several years older by the time they reached Melling's shop.

The working jeweller came from behind the bench at which he stood busily engaged, surrounded by the implements of his trade, and looked curiously at the trio. Ann bore his steady stare unflinchingly for a few moments while Mr. Christopher questioned the man as to whether he had "ever seen this woman, and if he could identify her as having been in his shop on any special occasion?" but she shivered, and a great sigh of relief burst from her when Melling shook his head and said decidedly:

"This is not the person who sold me the sapphire and diamond ring, sir. She was a fine, well set-up woman, smartly dressed in a long black silk cloak, a hat with fine black feathers on it, and a fringe, not a plain, dowdy woman like this."

"You said this morning that she was dark ('swarthy' was your word), that she had flashing dark eyes, and looked like a superior maid or upper servant. You said nothing about her being smart then," Mr. Christopher said testily, while Ann gazed

with dull, expressionless eyes at Melling, and looked, if possible, dowdier than before.

"Well, this one don't look like a superior maid or upper servant," Melling said gruffly, returning to his work.

"You are not prepared to swear that this is the same person from whom you purchased the ring?"

"Rather not, it's the other way round! I could almost swear that she is not the person, sir."

"That being the case I suppose we needn't detain you any longer," Mr. Christopher said, turning to Ann. It was inconsistent but essentially human on his part, that he felt quite as much incensed and aggrieved at Ann's having been acquitted as if she had been found guilty of stealing the ring. Accordingly he infused all the angry *hauteur* he had at command into his manner of addressing her, and for an instant Ann's eyes lost their dulness and flamed upon him.

"Apparently you think more of the clothes the woman wore than of her personal appearance. This woman is swarthy enough, and her eyes flash in the way you described to me this morning. However, it's no use wasting any more time with such an unobservant person as you seem to be. You will have to give the ring up, you know that, I suppose?"

"I paid a hundred pounds for it. I'm not going to give it up till I get my money back," the man grumbled.

"You must get your money back from the thief who defrauded you. I mean to have the ring," Mr. Christopher said grimly, as Ann, with a deep courtesy of mock humility and a few words to the effect that she "hoped he would be rewarded for his goodness to her," walked out of the shop.

"How did you pay the woman, by cheque or in notes?" the policeman asked practically.

"Seventy pounds in gold, and thirty in notes."

"Why were you ass enough to give her anything but a cheque?" Mr. Christopher asked.

"Well, sir, it was like this. The person said she was a stranger in London, and a cheque would be inconvenient, and I knew that the ring was worth pretty nigh double the hundred pounds I was giving her, so I wanted to close the bargain as quickly as possible. That's how I came to give it to her in gold and notes."

"Have you the number of the notes?"

"Yes, I did tick them down!"

"Then we must advertise for them. Trust me, sir, we shall nab the lady with the long black silk cloak before long," the policeman said cheerfully, and then they left Melling to his labour, and Mr. Christopher went back to the Goulds a happier and more hopeful man than he had been a few minutes previously.

He was himself a singularly "unobservant person," as he had stigmatized Melling. Otherwise he would have seen a lightning glance pass between Mrs. Gould and Sylvia when he was telling them of the description Melling had given of the woman's dress. Sylvia said nothing, but Mrs. Gould remarked quietly:

"Ann does not possess a silk cloak or mantle of any kind, and would not wear a feather for double her wages. The dress quite establishes her innocence in my mind."

"I shall know no rest until those notes are traced," Mr. Christopher said vindictively.

"Why? You've got the ring back," Lily said soothingly; "it's a pity to distress yourself about a thing when it's over, and you're none the worse for it," she added philosophically.

"I hope it may be a lesson to Sylvia to take more care of articles of value in future," Mr. Christopher remarked cautiously, as he awkwardly replaced the recovered jewel on the finger of his betrothed.

All that day Belle Warrener buoyed herself up with the hope that Arthur Stanmer would cast out his suspicions, and come back and tell her so. But when night came, and he had neither called nor wired nor sent a note, she determined to stoop to conquer one so worthy of her steel.

"He drove off, thinking me a deceitful, unprincipled, low, flirty girl, and appearances justified him in thinking it of me. I can't bear to be misjudged by such a dear old friend, even if he is never to be anything more to me. I'll write and make a clean breast of it, tell him the whole and the whole truth. Arthur's too loyal a gentleman to betray poor silly little Sylvia."

A dozen sheets of paper were destroyed before she worded an epistle that seemed to her to fulfil all the requirements of the case. What she then wrote ran as follows:

"MY DEAR ARTHUR,

"I felt angry at first that such an old friend as you are,

should have distrusted me so sadly as you evidently did this morning, when you drove by without a word. Now I only feel hurt and sorry, and as I want to keep your friendship and respect, I will tell you exactly what happened. This Mr. Ogilvie stopped me against my wish two or three minutes before you drove up, to ask about Sylvia Gould. He is the son of an old lady with whom poor Sylvia boarded for several months before her mother came back to England, and he and Sylvia have been foolish enough to fall in love with one another. She is to be married to a Mr. Christopher very soon, and he stopped me to beg me to intercede with her for an interview. Of course I shall not do it. He is the same scamp who took me in by pretending to be a starving tramp. The fact is, he has been an actor, and Dick the Tramp was one of his best parts. He is now a traveller for a wine merchant's house. For my dear old father's sake, do believe that I am not the frivolous, fast, foolish girl you thought me when you saw me talking to him this morning. I hate the man, and would do anything to save Sylvia Gould from his clutches.

"Believe me to be,

"Yours truly as ever,

"BELLE WARRENER."

This letter, as she did not know his London address, she directed to him at Dene Prior. As it happened, he had not returned home that night, so the next morning when his mother saw it lying on the plate in his vacant place, she took it up and recognizing Belle Warrener's writing, she sympathized with the Old Testament lady, whose soul was sick within her because of the daughters of Heth.

Arthur Stanmer had passed a miserable time since catching that blighting glimpse of Belle. He had been too pre-occupied to enjoy a chance *rencontre* with an old friend who had carried him off to dinner and Toole's Theatre. He had been much too cross to see any point in "Walker, London," which was not astonishing, as, though he kept his eyes steadily fixed on the house-boat the whole time, his mental vision was floating feverishly on every detail of that pernicious picture of Belle in close converse with the idealized tramp. His obtuseness with regard to Toole's humour disgusted his friend, who attributed it to the

influence of bucolic surroundings, and resolved to stir him up and bring him up to date if possible. By way of following out this programme his friend induced the unsettled young squire to go with him to an extremely Bohemian smoking concert, "where we are safe to find dozens of amusing fellows, actors and artists and journalists," he explained. Arthur Stanmer had no heart for anything of the sort, still he went, and he was rewarded as he entered the room by hearing "My Old Dutch," sung in his best style (a close copy of Albert Chevalier's) by Mr. Dick Ogilvie, who seemed to be extremely popular with the majority.

As Dick sang on, rendering the pathetic portions of the song with the restrained power of an artist, Arthur Stanmer forgot Belle, forgot his animosity to the scamp who had once frightened and insulted her, and thought of nothing but the staggering *familiarity* of the man's voice and appearance. He seemed to have known both from his earliest childhood! Suddenly he caught sight of his own face in a glass, and the mystery was solved. Saving that he was a fair, brown-haired man, and Dick Ogilvie had black hair and eyes of such a dark grey that they looked black in some lights, no two brothers, the sons of the same parents, could have been more alike. While as for the inflexions in and tones of his voice ("they're exactly like my father's, it might be my father singing now") he thought, and something, perhaps it was the smoke, seemed to blur his vision, and make all his future prospects seem hazy and indistinct.

(*To be continued.*)

LONDON SOCIETY.

APRIL, 1894.

A Bad Lot.*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST LINES OF THE ROMANCE.

JULIAN TEMPLE is standing on the bear-skin hearthrug in Mrs. Roscoe's drawing-room in Rutland Gate. It was not the first time he had dined at her house, and on a previous occasion when he had done so, he had registered a vow as he left her door that he would never be inveigled into dining with her again; for if her cook was unimpeachable, her friends bored him, and to be bored was, as I think I have already mentioned, the bugbear of Mr. Temple's existence.

Yet here he was again, very much against his inclinations, undergoing the usual penance of the *mauvais quart d'heure* before dinner, in a room full of people who were all of them utterly uncongenial to him.

The fact was that he had yielded to Cecil's earnest and personal entreaties on the subject. Cecil had appeared one day at his rooms in Piccadilly bearing his mother's invitation card in his hand; it was the morning after she had invited Nell.

"For Heaven's sake come and help me out, Temple," Cecil had entreated, when he saw that Julian began to shake his head doubtfully over the note. "My mother has asked my girl to this party—it was very grudgingly done, and I was in a mortal fear that she would take no notice of her at all, save leaving cards at

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the door. She flatly refused to let me bring her to see her, she said it would agitate her too much, and that her doctor tells her her heart is weak, and that she must avoid 'scenes,' and all sorts of excuses of that kind. But she happened to have got this dinner party on, and just at the last moment she said she would ask her to it, if I could find another man to make the number right, so do, like a good chap, come and help me out. I want the evening to go off well, and you to talk to her a bit, and make it pleasant to her."

And so, to oblige Cecil, he had accepted the invitation. He was calling himself a fool for his pains just now, as he looked round upon the assembling guests. An octogenarian earl, who was Mrs. Roscoe's chief and only aristocratic card, and his aged countess—he, weakly garrulous with the weight of years, and she, very deaf and dull; a bland and smiling city potentate, an ex-lord mayor who had been knighted during the period of his mayoralty in honour of the birth of some royal baby; his wife, broad and bland like her husband, and very much over-dressed without being well dressed, in salmon-coloured satin; a wealthy stockbroker of swarthy complexion and Hebraic features, with diamond studs in his shirt front; his wife, a dark-browed lady, like unto himself, with a perfect shop front of jewellery displayed upon and about her capacious bosom. There were also a couple of men of uncertain age, and of insignificant and unrefined exterior, and a thin young lady very smartly dressed, who sat by herself upon a distant sofa, and looked intensely miserable.

Amongst all these people Julian Temple looked like some one out of another hemisphere.

Without being in the least handsome, he possessed nevertheless that air of distinction which ensures superiority to a man in almost any company in which he may find himself. It was impossible to pass him over in a crowd. He had the perfectly quiet and self-contained manners of a man who is born to the best society, and who at thirty-eight years of age has learnt to understand, without over estimating, his own position in the world.

In appearance he was a somewhat largely built man; tall and broad-shouldered, with a complexion tanned to a healthy red brown; his hair was so liberally sprinkled with grey that it was impossible now to do more than guess at its original colour;

his eyebrows were brown and well defined ; his eyes deep set, dark blue, and kindly ; his nose rather large, his mouth, that was partially concealed by a tawny brown moustache, of a singular and almost womanly sweetness—his chin, on the other hand, was square and resolute, cleft with a deep dimple in the centre ; he was always very carefully dressed, although there was nothing about his toilette that could suggest the exaggerations of fashion or foppery.

If I have gone somewhat minutely into this description of Julian Temple's personal appearance, it is because no man on earth ever bore his character more plainly inscribed upon his face than he did. There was in him a mixture of strength and of weakness, of manliness and womanly gentleness, of stern resolution almost amounting to obstinacy—that at times was liable to be utterly swept away by a softness of heart that would as often as not make shipwreck of his best considered determinations. Such a man may be uncertain in his moods and tempers—he may even be inconsistent and undependable—but with it all he is almost invariably lovable.

Mr. Temple stood in the middle of Mrs. Roscoe's hearthrug and looked, as indeed he felt, like a fish out of water.

The heroine of the evening had not yet arrived, and in spite of the unsympathetic nature of his surroundings, he experienced a decided and growing curiosity to see Cecil's *fiancée*.

It soon became apparent to him that she was the last, and that she was late.

He overheard a whispered word or two between Mrs. Roscoe and Mrs. Torrens :

"I should not wait," he heard the latter say.

"My dear, it is only five minutes after the hour ! I think we had better wait another moment or two. Cecil would be so much annoyed if we went down without her."

"It is very bad taste on her part to be late," rejoined the elder lady, ill-temperedly.

"Poor little soul !" thought Julian to himself pityingly as they moved away together.

Cecil was apparently ill at ease—he fidgeted about the room from one person to another, making irrelevant remarks about the weather, and moving away again without waiting for a response, with his head and eyes constantly turned towards the door.

A few minutes ago he had taken Julian up to the sad-faced young lady on the sofa, and had introduced her to him as Miss Vincent. Mr. Temple, who was at least grateful to the octogenarian peer for saving him from the honour of taking down his hostess, merely bowed and retired again to his hearthrug; he said to himself that it would be hard enough to find subjects of conversation with that girl through dinner—there was surely no need to begin the exhaustive process beforehand.

An elderly gentleman near him, who was discussing the rise and fall of the commercial markets with the Israelitish stock-broker, answered also to the name of Vincent—he took him to be the father of his fate.

How deadly uninteresting all these people were!

Mr. Temple groaned internally, and wished again for the twentieth time that he had never been such a fool as to come.

At last the door opened again, and the butler announced—
“Miss Eleanor Forrester.”

From that moment Julian Temple ceased to regret that he was dining in Rutland Gate.

He thought her the loveliest creature he had ever set eyes on. She wore a dress of pale blue gauze—it was very shabby, and a little faded in colour, and was made according to the cut and fashion of two seasons ago. It was a garment that had, in fact, belonged to Dottie, and had been hurriedly cut down and taken in, and otherwise furbished up by the united efforts of home labours—maids and mistresses—in order to render Nell presentable for her visit to London. But Nell's beauty was of that rare and high order that can scarcely be marred by any dress, however ill-made and old fashioned. The faded blue did but set off the brilliance of her hair and eyes and the exquisite tints of her complexion, and the tumbled and creased folds fell deftly into the lines of her slender figure, and gathered themselves with a natural grace about her rounded bosom and dainty waist. There was a frightened look in her beautiful grey eyes as she came alone into the large room full of strangers, yet she carried her small head high, and there was a thorough-bred look about her that set her far away above every other woman in the room.

Julian became deeply and intensely interested in her entrance; he saw that her red lips were parted, and that her white bosom

fluttered, and he guessed that her heart must be beating with nervousness at the formidable nature of this public reception, and he hated the mother and the aunt of his friend, and his friend too, into the bargain, for allowing her to be subjected to such a cruel ordeal.

Cecil had hastened to her side, and it seemed to Julian that his whispered greeting to her must contain a scolding, for he caught the words of her faint excuse—"I am really very sorry, but the cab was so slow. I thought the horse would have tumbled on his nose."

Then Mrs. Roscoe came forward and shook hands with her exactly as she had done with all her other guests, with just a stereotyped word or two of pleasure at seeing her, calling out almost in the same breath to the butler over her head—"Dinner at once, please."

So that Nell felt immediately that she was in disgrace, and that her lateness was accounted unto her as a sin. Mrs. Torrens also exchanged a few cold words with her—mainly about the weather and the unsatisfactory nature of cabs—after which she was deposited in a chair, Cecil hanging rather feebly about her for the few remaining minutes upstairs.

As to Nell, she was too bewildered and, if the truth be told too mortified, to see anybody or anything for some few moments. It was only after she found herself seated at the long dinner table that she gathered heart and courage to look about her. All that she saw dismayed and oppressed her. The very table, laden with flowers and with silver, with rose-coloured paper shades to soften the light, and the rich smells of well-cooked dishes pervading the atmosphere—although it was only the ordinary dinner party aspect of the commonplace London banquet—was an astonishment and a revelation to her. If this was the way that Cecil had been accustomed to live—if this glitter of silver and glass, these dainty dishes, this never ending succession of wines—this oppressive sense of state and splendour were the natural attributes of his home, then how squalid and beggarly, how ill-arranged and disorderly must not Marshlands and its happy-go-lucky life appear in his eyes! And then the people! There were sixteen of them in all—enough surely to be merry and happy together—yet it seemed to Nell that she had never seen so many dull and uninterested

faces gathered together. They talked in bated tones ; there was a sort of murmur that went round, interspersed with intervals of silence ; their knives and forks in fact often drowned the sound of their voices.

There was never a laugh that seemed to be spontaneous, nor a jest exchanged, nor an eye that shone and sparkled with responsive pleasure. The smiles, like the voices, were cold, and forced, and measured. Cecil sat intrenched about with dowagers at the end of the table—the mayor's lady on his left talked about the new county councillors, whilst he did his best to convey her remarks second-hand down the ear trumpet of the aged countess on his right. People to the right and left of Nell talked about the most uninteresting things ; they mainly discussed mutual acquaintances, and their sayings and doings, or related dreary anecdotes concerning the seaside or country outings that every one had just come back from. They compared the relative prices of hotels, and the beneficial effects that the air and the change had had upon their respective healths.

An elderly gentleman with a sallow complexion and lanky black hair had escorted Nell into dinner, and presently as in duty bound he attempted to enter into conversation with her.

"Do you consider London full for the time of the year?" he inquired politely.

"I really don't know," answered Nell ; "I was never in London at this time of the year before."

"Indeed!" he ejaculated, looking round at her for a moment as if she had said something very remarkable. After which he finished his soup in silence.

"Did you ever eat turtle soup at a Mansion House dinner?" was his next venture—suggested no doubt by the fluid he had just consumed.

"I have never eaten turtle soup anywhere in my life," replied Nell with a laugh.

And after that her neighbour gave her up. He probably considered her past praying for.

Nell sat in absolute silence for a seemingly endless period. The fish—two kinds—went round in succession ; then came sweetbreads. She had no heart to eat, she felt too utterly crushed and miserable, like a stranded creature in a strange land, her only friend divided from her by a barricade of flowers

and a wilderness of glass and silver, and so absorbed in his duties as a host to the old ladies on either side of him, that he could not even find time to give her a glance.

He might have looked at her now and then, thought Nell, who about this period began to experience a childish desire to cry. A little smile across the crowd of strange faces would have been such a help to her! But Cecil—although she did not know it—would have thought such a proceeding the height of indecorum. He was in love with her, but not so much in love as to render him oblivious of the conventionalities of society.

Just at this moment when things were at their worst with her, some one on the other side turned round squarely in his chair and said to her with a very bright and winning smile :

“ Well, Miss Forrester, and what are you thinking about, I wonder ? ”

She felt some surprise at hearing herself addressed by name, but the kind eyes and the pleasant face won her confidence at once.

“ I was thinking,” she said in a lowered voice, with a little answering gleam of fun in her upturned eyes, “ the thoughts of an outlaw—I fear ! ”

“ And what are they ? You can tell me safely, because I am an outlaw too—at heart.”

“ I was thinking how deadly dull, respectable society seems to be,” she replied in a lowered voice.

Julian Temple laughed. “ Have you come to that conclusion already ? ”

“ Is it *always* like this ? ” inquired Nell almost with awe.

“ The average London dinner party is usually framed much on the same lines ; sometimes it is of a higher standard of intelligence, sometimes lower ; this represents a very fair average, I should say.”

“ Then what on earth makes people dine out ? If it is only for the food, they might have the same dishes at home, and save themselves the weariness of eating them in public.”

“ The food, I fancy, is only the secondary consideration—sometimes it is very secondary. I must admit,” added Temple, with all a man’s generous appreciation of a good dinner, “ that Mrs. Roscoe’s cook is an admirable person ; but alas ! even that solace is not always at hand to counterbalance the tedium of these functions.”

"Then why do people give dinner parties at all?"

"The whole system of dinner-giving in London is based upon a principle of give and take. There is a tacit understanding that the entertained shall pay back the entertainer in kind. 'I ask you to dinner and you must ask me back again,' is the scarcely veiled compact in the dinner-giving world. 'Or else, if you can't repay my dinner by giving me one in return, you must make it worth my while to invite you. You must contribute good looks, smart clothes, clever conversation or vocal accomplishments; you must in short make yourself of some use or value to me in order to recoup me for the food you consume!'"

Nell looked up at him quietly and meditatively for half a moment, and then she said with a little gleam of malice in the corner of her eye: "I wonder why you came here to-night!"

His eyes met hers with a curious expression in them. "If I gave you twenty guesses you would never find out," he said smiling. "So I will tell you at once. I came here for you."

"For *me!*" she repeated in amazement, a wave of colour flooding her sensitive face.

"Yes; solely and simply for you! To talk to you, to amuse you, to make friends with you! Don't look so astonished! I am an old friend of Cecil's, and he wanted me to know you. I have sympathized with him about his engagement, and now more than ever, since I have seen you. You poor little thing," he added on a sudden impulse, lowering his voice and bending down a little towards the shell-like ear and the pure sweet profile that was now turned towards him, "I am so sorry, it was so hard on you!"

She knew at once instinctively what he meant. That he was thinking of her entrance—of her first meeting with Cecil's mother—of Cecil himself, too far off to render her any help or countenance. Her grateful eyes flashed up her thanks into his. What bewildering eyes they were! Something, he knew not what, smote suddenly through his veins. A warm gladness—a sense of joy indescribable. It was as though some one had opened to him a door into some unknown and lovely land where, if he might not enter, he might at least stand at the threshold and gaze his fill.

"Now, we must be real friends, you and I," he said, after a moment of strange and sympathetic silence. "You must tell me

about your home in Fenshire. I know some people down there." He did not mention their name, deeming that they would not be acquaintances, and not wishing to embarrass her. "Sometimes I go there for shooting—indeed I believe I am going there next week. Do you know it is the fashion to call Fenshire flat and ugly, but I always think there is a curious fascination about it."

"Oh yes, is there not!" she assented eagerly. "It has a charm of its own, different to every other country. It is so wide, so breezy, and so changeful in colouring," and then she found herself telling him all about the sunset views from her bedroom window, the red glow across the level plains, and the pearly greys of dusk; about the flights of birds wending southwards in the autumn, the wild ducks that swirled across the marshes towards the evening sky. Then, again, she described to him how in the winter, wild storms swept over the lowering heavens, and how the winds soughed and sobbed all night long amongst the chimney-stacks of her home. She drew these pictures vividly and graphically with an artist's touch in her language, and with all the fervour of a keen and impassioned lover of nature in all her moods.

He found himself listening with more and more interest, and more and more eagerness. He wondered vaguely if she talked liked that to Cecil, or if she did, whether he understood her. The imaginative faculty in her, and the picturesque language in which she clothed some of her fanciful ideas, appealed to him strongly. He found himself talking to her back again as he had never talked before to any one, telling her of a thought that had lain for long, deep in the depths of his mind. It was the sketch of a romance, to be called "The Romance of Risen Souls," who were to sweep through the world on the wings of the storm winds, revisiting the scenes of their earthly abodes; of how they would find others filling the places that had once been theirs, and of how the remorseless winds would catch them up again and hurry them onwards.

It was wonderful how this girl entered into his thought and grasped the details of this somewhat eccentric fantasy. Once or twice, indeed, she suggested something entirely new to him, some improvement on his own idea. The vividness of her conceptions and the quickness of her comprehension surprised and delighted him.

"If that book is ever written, we must certainly collaborate,"

he said at last with a smile, recalling himself with an effort to a lighter frame of mind. "After all that you have said, I could never write it alone!"

"I hope—I hope—I have not said very foolish things," said Nell timidly, becoming once more the little shy country girl he had thought her at first. "One has so many odd fancies of which one never speaks, and it is good of you to have let me talk to you about mine."

"I have never enjoyed anything more in my life than listening to them," he said earnestly. "Some of your thoughts are beautiful. I have never met a keener appreciation of the effects of sky and weather in any artist I have known."

Nell blushed with pleasure.

"Ah, that is all because I have been born and bred in the dear fen country. Come and see it soon."

"I will, very soon," he answered, his eyes meeting hers more eagerly than perhaps he had any idea of.

After the ladies had gone upstairs, Julian strolled round to where Cecil was sitting.

"Well," the young barrister looked up eagerly, "how did she get on?" he asked a little anxiously. "She is lovely, isn't she? Did she find anything to talk about?"

"She talked better than any one I have met for a long time, my dear fellow. Your *fiancée* is not only beautiful in face, Cecil—she has a very beautiful and poetical mind."

"Has she?" said Cecil, looking rather astonished and puzzled. Nell was lovely and sweet and fascinating, certainly, but that she possessed a mind at all was a considerable surprise to him.

"Oh! Well, old man, I am glad you got on with her," he said lightly after half a moment's pause.

"He does not appreciate her in the very least," thought Julian.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS VINCENT'S PAINTED CUSHION.

UPSTAIRS, they talked about their servants.

Nell sat by herself upon a sofa, and for some time nobody spoke to her. Mrs. Roscoe had flung herself heart and soul into

a sympathetic discussion with the aged peeress over the shortcomings of her housekeeper. Mrs. Torrens bemoaned herself to the ex-lady mayoress over the general flightiness and love of finery displayed by maidservants of the present day, and a little way off two younger married ladies poured out mutual confidences, in bated voices, concerning their experiences in the feeding of young infants, diversified by anecdotes of the goings on of their respective nursery-maids.

Nell sipped her coffee, and wished herself back in Wimpole Street. Old Lady Forrester, with her caustic remarks, her little cynical speeches, half humorous, half bitter, was infinitely more amusing, she thought, than all these dull, prosy women, who had not, it seemed to her, two ideas in their heads. She tried to shut her ears to the senseless and brainless chatter, and to recall every word of her late conversation with her neighbour at dinner. There was a little flutter of excitement in her mind about him. She had never met any one quite like him before. He attracted and interested her, and she hoped that he would speak to her again when the gentlemen came upstairs. At this moment the dull-faced young lady came over from the other side of the room and sat down beside her.

"I think I must introduce myself to you, Miss Forrester, although, of course, you must know all about me already from Cecil. I am Ida Vincent."

Nell smiled and bowed, but did not quite know what remark was expected of her.

"Of course Cecil has talked to you of me," continued Miss Vincent, "for I am the oldest friend he has in the world."

"Indeed? I can't exactly remember, but you see I have not known Cecil very long."

"No; so I understand. You can certainly not know him as I do, Miss Forrester. He and I have been dear friends since our childhood."

There was a certain aggressiveness about the way these words were spoken, that made Nell feel vaguely uncomfortable. She did not know why Miss Vincent should be at such pains to point out her own superior knowledge of Cecil to her.

"You cannot know as I do," went on Miss Vincent, warming to her subject, "how superior he is to most men—how clever

and wise, and how good and honourable is his nature. You are a very fortunate girl, Miss Forrester."

"I am glad you think so," answered Nell without any enthusiasm. She had no intention of discussing Cecil's character with this young lady, whose remarks struck her as being in singularly bad taste. In order to change the subject she inquired: "Can you tell me the name of the gentleman who sat between us at dinner?"

"The gentleman who took me down, and who talked to you all the time, you mean?" said Ida with a little spiteful laugh. "Not that you were not perfectly welcome to him. I think he is a dreadful person, although he is a friend of Cecil's. His name is Mr. Julian Temple."

"Why is he a dreadful person?" asked Nell, with amusement.

"I do not like that type of man. I have never met him before, and I never wish to meet him again, for I have heard that he is one of those unscrupulous society men-about-town whose chief amusement is to draw people out—inexperienced girls especially, whom he considers fair prey—and then he makes fun of them afterwards, and repeats everything they say to the next person he talks to. I consider that sort of thing most reprehensible, don't you?"

"Certainly, if it is true. I may not have your experience, Miss Vincent, but I can hardly believe that Mr. Temple is the kind of person you describe."

And after that Nell became rather thoughtful, and only answered in monosyllables.

Miss Vincent said a great many other things to her, chiefly in praise of Cecil and of his mother and his aunt, whom she said were the kindest and dearest women in the world.

"I live three doors off, you see," she said, "so I have every opportunity of knowing how good they are. Nothing can exceed their kindness to myself, for instance. My father is a great deal away, and my mother is an invalid, and is obliged to go to bed early every evening, and dear Mrs. Roscoe likes me to bring my work and sit with them in the evenings—I am almost like one of the family, I may say—and a dearer, kinder woman than Mrs. Roscoe does not exist on earth."

Nell suddenly turned round and considered her companion

attentively. Ida's face, now she looked at it again, bore an expression that was not altogether attractive. She began to perceive instinctively that this young lady had no friendly feeling towards her, and that all these things were being said simply in order to make her feel uncomfortable. There was a spice of malice in these reiterated assertions of her own well-established footing in the family, as spoken to the girl to whom nobody paid any particular attention, although she was to be the wife of the son of the house.

"Do you think Mrs. Roscoe is particularly kind to me, Miss Vincent?" she inquired suddenly. "I am to marry her son, as you know, and she has never seen me before. She asks me to this formal dinner party, and as you see she has not yet spoken a dozen words to me. Now am I to believe her to be the kind-hearted woman you describe in the face of this marked unkindness to myself?"

"Oh, of course, Miss Forrester, I cannot answer for what Mrs. Roscoe may do always. I only speak of people as I find them. To me, Mrs. Roscoe has always been goodness itself, but then I know she is very fond of me. She loves me—as a daughter almost!" added Ida, with an irrepressible desire to vaunt her superior position in Mrs. Roscoe's estimation to this girl who had come between Cecil and herself. "But for her he would have married me!" she thought, with a dull, miserable anger at her heart, and she hated Nell for her beauty and for her success.

She had said at first that she would not dine here to-night, and then a craving curiosity to see the girl who had taken Cecil from her, overcame her reluctance to accept the invitation. If she could have found her to be what she had heard the elder women say of her—vulgar, unladylike, loud in manner, and offensive in conversation, Ida would have extracted some amount of consolation out of it, but Nell's lovely face and quiet self-possessed manners, her success at dinner with a man she had always heard spoken of as something of a lion in society owing to his originality and his exclusiveness, and who had scarcely vouchsafed to speak a dozen words about the weather to herself, all increased her jealousy and her envy.

Ida had heard a great deal in these last days about Cecil's engagement, and about the extreme undesirableness of the Forrester connection. Mrs. Torrens was a person who always spoke

her mind, and she had not minced her words about her reminiscences of the Forresters as she remembered them in her younger days—even when Ida had been present. Sometimes, indeed, she had gone so far, that Mrs. Roscoe, with greater discretion, had placed a warning finger upon her lip, and murmured “hush,” with a side glance at Ida’s thin figure stooping under the lamp light over her fancy work.

“Oh, Ida is a child, she won’t understand,” Mrs. Torrens had answered carelessly.

But Ida was no child, and she understood perfectly. She understood that this marriage was considered by his mother and aunt to be a disastrous thing for Cecil—that the girl had no money, and that her people were not visited by anybody in Fenshire, which surely pointed to something very disreputable in their antecedents! Ida knew, moreover, that she herself would have been highly acceptable to them as a wife for Cecil. She had had three proposals of marriage in her life, not one of the aspirants to her hand and fortune being under fifty years of age, but as her affections were centred upon Cecil Roscoe, she had dismissed her elderly suitors with immediate and decisive promptitude. She was aware that about a year ago her father and Mrs. Roscoe had had a little private interview together, of which she herself was the subject.

“Of course, my girl might have looked higher than a barrister in poor practice,” Mr. Vincent had stated on that occasion, very frankly and openly; “but still I gather that she is fond of your son, and we are old friends, Mrs. Roscoe, and I should be quite satisfied to see her happily married to him. It will save me a world of trouble and my poor wife too; for we neither of us can go trotting Ida out to parties in order to find her a husband,” and then Mr. Vincent had proceeded to state the sum that he would be prepared to “lay down” at his daughter’s marriage, and the further sum she would inherit at his death. And these details had caused the mouth of Cecil’s mother to water with desire and longing, for the sums mentioned appeared to her to be fabulous.

“Of course, you must understand that my son would never consent to give up his profession to live upon his wife’s money,” said Mrs. Roscoe proudly, with a due regard to her own and Cecil’s dignity.

"Quite right," answered Mr. Vincent cordially. "I should be very sorry if he did. I am a business man myself, and approve of work for a young man."

"And dear Mr. Vincent, if on that account alone—that he may get on at the Bar, and establish himself thoroughly before entering upon a new life—I do not wish my boy to marry for the next two or three years."

"Oh, well, I am in no hurry to get rid of my girl. We would rather keep her at home, in fact, as long as we can, though we shall be glad to feel that her future is settled. A year or two of waiting won't hurt either of them, and we are too near neighbours to run away from each other."

And so they thought they had settled everything very comfortably. This conversation had taken place more than a year ago, and from the date of it there had existed a tacit understanding between Mr. and Mrs. Vincent on the one side and Mrs. Roscoe and Mrs. Torrens on the other, but it was agreed that the young people should be left in ignorance of this compact of their elders. Ida, however, had known all about it from the first, for she had wormed every detail of the momentous interview out of her mother.

From that time the friendship between the two families was still further cemented. Ida was pressed to come to the house whenever she liked, and she got into the habit of running in and out of it at all hours of the day. She was always welcomed warmly; the two ladies without being actually mercenary would have been less than human had they not looked at her through the glorified halo of her father's money bags, and to do them justice they were in addition sincerely fond of her. Ida was docile and deferential; her manners were quiet and her shyness and lack of conversation were no drawback in their eyes.

They said to each other that she was ladylike and modest; and in some people's opinion it is scarcely necessary, or even desirable, for a woman to be anything more. Had she been a little cleverer, Ida might have found out for herself that Cecil treated her as a sister or a cousin, but was never likely to regard her as anything else. But perhaps she could not, and very certainly she did not, wish to see this—she preferred to receive all the pettings and the flattering encouragements from his mother and aunt, and to cheat

herself into the fancy that he himself was ready to fall in with the views of his elders.

The blow of his engagement fell very heavily upon her. After all these hopes and plans, these tacit understandings and secret arrangements for his welfare, it was hard indeed upon them all that everything should be so unexpectedly and fatally upset by Cecil himself; and, of course, as Ida really cared for him, it fell harder on her than on any one else. Her nature, which was a somewhat narrow and cold one, might, under the sunshine of love and happiness, not improbably have expanded into something better and nobler. She had seemed a sweet and good girl to Cecil's mother during the time that all had promised brightly for her future. Perhaps, had everything gone on well and smoothly, she might have remained sweet and good to the end of the chapter. But Ida was one of those people—and they are without number in the world—upon whom adversity has an evil and a deteriorating effect. All the surface goodness and sweetness seemed to be burnt and dried up in her by this cruel stroke of fortune. There remained nothing but the soured and somewhat spiteful substratum which had perhaps always lain dormant at the base of her disposition. Hatred and envy of her more fortunate rival, and a wild desire to do something—she knew not what—to upset her happiness and to snatch Cecil back to herself, filled her whole heart. To-night, for the first time, all these thoughts began to take a definite shape within her. A few days ago she had overheard Mrs. Roscoe say to her sister-in-law:

“All is not lost yet. Cecil has promised me that the marriage shall not take place before Easter. Between this and then who knows what may not happen! He may come to see with his own eyes that such a marriage can never bring him happiness. Bad parents make bad children, and no daughter of that house can inherit anything but evil tendencies.”

Ida had treasured up that speech in her heart. She was thinking of it now as she sat by Nell's side, looking with scarcely veiled repulsion at the lovely face of Cecil's betrothed.

“What can she do for him, a penniless girl with not even respectable connections?” she thought—“whereas papa's money would help him on in the world—push him in his profession, and perhaps enable him to go into Parliament by-and-bye.”

Nell, who did not understand her, yet who began to dislike her

a little, was playing with the tassels of a sofa cushion against which she happened to be leaning. It was a white satin cushion with an Italian landscape painted upon it surrounded by a wreath of roses. It was certainly not a work of high art, yet there was a certain effective prettiness about it. Nell still held her coffee cup in her hand, and Miss Vincent offered politely to put it down for her. A little coffee was left in the cup, and somehow, in transferring it from one to the other, the cup slipped in the saucer, and some of it was spilt upon the satin cushion.

A mere trifle is frequently enough to influence a whole after-life, and although one never ceases to wonder at the infinitesimal causes which so often move the machinery of human events, yet the only wonder should be that the insignificant incidents of existence do not oftener bring about greater results.

A few drops of coffee accidentally spilt upon a sofa cushion—nothing more important than that! And yet in after days the little incident was destined to return to Nell's memory with an almost startling significance.

With an exclamation of regret, she tried to wipe off the stain with her pocket handkerchief.

"I am so dreadfully sorry; I am afraid it must have been my fault. It will spoil the cushion, coffee stains are so hard to get out—and it is exactly in the middle of the landscape, on the blue of the sky!"

"Oh, never mind," said Ida, "it doesn't signify; and perhaps I can do something to put it right. I painted it originally, so I ought to be able to do something."

"You painted it? How very clever of you!" And Nell, who was, secretly perhaps, a little anxious to propitiate this disagreeable young woman who was so much at home in Cecil's family, became outspoken in her admiration of the cushion.

"But it is beautifully done! You must have a great talent for painting, Miss Vincent. This is almost like a miniature, and I am sure it must be extremely difficult to produce such a delicate effect upon the texture of satin."

"Oh, no, it is not difficult when you have been taught how to do it," answered Ida, somewhat mollified by the admiration for an accomplishment on which she prided herself. "I took lessons from a lady at first, who showed me how to set about it. She sometimes gives me a lesson now; would you like to have her

address? It would be a great charity if you could recommend her. She is the widow of a clergyman; and she supports herself entirely by giving lessons in painting on ivory and on satin. She has regular employment in fan painting for two or three shops, but she is very glad of pupils as well."

All at once, whilst Miss Vincent was speaking, there flashed back into Nell's mind a vision of her girlish days. She seemed to see herself seated—one of a row of six unformed girls, all between the age of fourteen and fifteen—down one side of a bare dining-room table, whilst opposite them sat the vicar of the parish imparting religious instruction to the girl candidates of his confirmation class. It was a sad, dull room, with a dingy side-board at one end of it and a fireless grate at the other, although the room faced north and the afternoons were cold and chilly, and in front of the empty hearth stood a square screen in an old-fashioned mahogany frame, on which there was a painting—a shepherdess in a blue gown, with a crook in one hand and a bunch of red flowers in the other; behind her a green hill far away, on which sundry drab-coloured spots were dotted about. They might have been toadstools, but by the sense and context of the picture they were probably a flock of sheep browsing, and the whole scene was set upon a background of discoloured yellowish white satin. Then there would come a sharp voice recalling the wandering attention of the weary fourteen-year-old catechumen:

"Miss Eleanor Forrester, you are not attending to me in the least. I see that you are admiring my wife's beautiful handiwork. When the class is over you are quite at liberty to examine it, but just now kindly listen to me and answer the question I have put to you twice over. What were the names of the six cities of refuge appointed by Joshua for the children of Israel on the east side of the Jordan?"

Nell Forrester was not able to answer that all-important question; it is doubtful if, to this very day, she has ever rightly known the names of those cities of refuge; but the shepherdess upon the faded satin screen had always remained indelibly associated in her memory with that particular question, and with the somewhat dull and dry instruction imparted generally to confirmation classes held by the well-meaning but exceedingly prosy Mr. Hartwood, vicar of the parish of Marshlands. She thought

about that screen and the painted shepherdess now. A little sickening doubt fluttered uncertainly across her mind—and yet, how ridiculous! There must be hundreds of poor ladies in England who teach painting on satin, and amongst them many, no doubt, who are clergymen's wives and widows in straitened circumstances; nevertheless a vague repugnance, something indefinite and intangible, that she could not account for, made her shrink from inquiring the name of Miss Vincent's instructress.

"Oh, I am afraid it would be no use giving me her address, Miss Vincent, thank you all the same," she said a little hurriedly. "I am not at all clever, I am afraid. We none of us have any accomplishments, beyond the making of our own dresses. I am sure I could not be of any use to the lady," and then, to her unspeakable relief, the gentlemen entered the room, and Cecil came and sat down by her side.

"I wonder why she refused to be told her address!" said Ida Vincent to herself that night, when she was thinking over the events of the evening in her own bedroom; "she looked so oddly at me, and she turned quite pale first, and then quite red—and I think—I almost think—that she looked frightened!—I wonder why?"

CHAPTER XII.

ACROSS HYDE PARK.

NELL'S visit to London, in so far as the primary object of it was concerned, was undoubtedly a failure.

To make friends with Cecil's people, and to ingratiate herself into the heart of his mother, had been the principal reasons for her coming to town; and when the last day of her visit came, he was forced to admit to himself that the effort had failed most woefully and lamentably. Mrs. Roscoe, as a matter of fact, had no intention of making friends with Nell Forrester; every step that she might have taken towards her, would have been, in her estimation, only a step in the wrong direction. Her chief desire was that the match might be broken off, and that Cecil might return, as she imagined, to his allegiance to Ida Vincent. Why, then, should she go out of her way to strengthen and cement this undesirable engagement—and to further the cause of an unwished-for daughter-in-law? "If you ever marry her, it will be time enough then to see about loving her," she had said to her

son, when he appealed to her earnestly—almost passionately—to be good to Nell.

“Time enough and to spare!” echoed Mrs. Torrens significantly and acidly.

Cecil was pacing impatiently up and down his mother’s drawing-room, three days after the dinner party.

“I intend to marry her,” he answered his mother, angrily and doggedly.

“Well, my dear boy, that remains to be seen. You, yourself, might change your mind. Of course, if you do marry her, then I shall endeavour to do my duty to her, for your sake.”

Then Cecil went and knelt down by his mother’s chair, and put his arms coaxingly about her.

“My dear mother, do try to like her a little for herself now. You must admire her; you must see how lovely and sweet she is.”

“Beauty is but skin deep,” croaked Mrs. Torrens from her corner, clicking her long knitting pins with a vicious ardour as she spoke.

Cecil went on without seeming to hear his aunt; he could not very well get up and take her by the shoulders and put her out of the room. Yet, short of these extreme measures, it would have been impossible to exclude her from the family councils. She was, perhaps, afraid that her sister-in-law might be overcome by maternal weakness if she herself was not at hand to give her support, for she never left her alone with her son in these days.

“Dearest mother, why are you so hard upon poor Nell?” continued the young man pleadingly. “I am willing to admit that there is much to be said against her family; I deplore all that side of the question quite as much as you do.”

“Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers,” ejaculated Mrs. Torrens behind him.

“But in Nell nobody can find a fault; it would be impossible!” he went on, disregarding the scriptural interpolation.

“My dear Cecil, I have really done all I can, at present,” said Mrs. Roscoe irritably. “I have called on her, and I have had her here to dinner.”

“As to calling, my dear mother, you can scarcely consider it a ‘call,’ seeing that you only just left your cards at the door!”

"Well, and how could we possibly set foot in the house of that wicked old woman, Lady Forrester!" cried out Mrs. Torrens fiercely. "Do you not know that she is the worst of the whole brood? A Forrester herself by birth, married to her first cousin—the vices of both branches of the family are centred in that woman—how can you imagine that your mother and I could enter her house!"

"I asked Miss Eleanor to dinner!" murmured Mrs. Roscoe plaintively and soothingly. "Surely I have done everything you have a right to expect of me, Cecil!"

"Of what use was it to ask her to a formal dinner party of sixteen people!" cried Cecil angrily. "What opportunity had you of improving your acquaintance with her in such a crowd—unless, indeed, you follow it up with something more?"

"But, my dear Cecil," remonstrated his mother, "is it desirable that I should put myself forward in order to encourage this disastrous affair? Oh, my dear boy, why need you go on with this miserable engagement? Why cannot you find your happiness with that dear good girl whom you have known all your life? who has no disreputable grandmother and mother—no shady out-at-elbows father and sisters to bring annoyance and discredit upon you—a girl whom you have known from her childhood upwards; whose pure innocent life is open to us all, and who, in addition, would bring you wealth and prosperity, and the certain security of a peaceful and well-ordered home. Oh, Cecil! why could you not have been content to find your happiness with her?"

"Are you talking about little Ida Vincent, mother?" inquired Cecil. "Good gracious!" and then he burst out laughing. "Why, I never thought about her in my life, nor should I ever have done so, even had I never met Nell Forrester! But really, dear mother, I don't think it is quite fair to bring Ida's name into this discussion, for I am quite sure she has nothing but the most sisterly regard for me."

Mrs. Roscoe burst into tears. "You are my only child!" she sobbed. "I had hoped so much for you, that you would have made such a good marriage."

Cecil felt distressed—he could not bear to see his mother cry. "Dearest mother, it may not be a good marriage in a wordly sense of the words, but do look at things in the

right way. If only one woman on earth can make a man happy, surely it is good for him to marry that one woman and none other? Even Aunt Torrens must admit that, I am sure," he added, turning towards the elder woman and holding out a propitiatory hand to her. For in these early days Cecil would have moved heaven and earth to have softened the hearts of these two women towards the girl he loved. Mrs. Torrens took his hand. She was just a little bit melted, for hard and ungracious as she was, she was really fond of him.

"I am afraid you will repent of this blind infatuation, my dear boy; you will find out your mistake!"

"When I do, I will come and confess to you that I was mistaken, aunt."

The upshot of it all was that it was agreed that Cecil should bring Nell to afternoon tea in Rutland Gate on the eve of her return home. Cecil had hoped great things from this concession, but when the tea party was over, he could not honestly say that his expectations and hopes had been in any way realized.

The meeting had been full of constraint on both sides. Neither of the elder ladies were gifted with much of that gracious tact which helps out a difficult position. They were formally cold and studiously polite in their reception of her, and Nell, who had honestly desired, for Cecil's sake, to make herself winning and pleasant to them, was gradually thrown back upon herself and frozen into coldness and nervous shyness.

The conversation by degrees became more and more laboured and difficult, and merged itself at last into a sort of subdued antagonism. Once or twice, scarcely veiled little sneers and slighting remarks concerning her belongings, made Nell's temper rise and the angry colour flash into her face, while Cecil sat by feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. For instance, when she spoke of her grandmother's advancing age and failing eyesight, Mrs. Torrens pursed up her lips into a disdainful silence, whilst Mrs. Roscoe suggested the consolations of religion as a fitting antidote for a worldly and ill-spent life. When again she happened to mention her father, Mrs. Roscoe immediately inquired after her uncle Robert, whom Nell had never seen. "He and my father are not very good friends," she explained a little hesitatingly.

"Ah! I am not surprised to hear that," Mrs. Roscoe had

replied significantly. "Your uncle Robert was not in the least like your father, and he was most fortunate in his wife; he married a good woman and a thoroughbred lady." The subject was an awkward one, and Cecil changed it hastily by asking Nell if she had had any news of her sisters, and then poor Nell, all unconsciously, put the finishing stroke to her misdemeanours by her perfectly innocent and unconscious reply :

"Yes, I had a letter from Dottie last night. She was in high spirits. They had all been over in a wagonette to the Fenchester races, and only fancy, Dottie backed Hereward to win, and Jolly-boy for a place! Can you imagine such luck! But she is always so lucky! it is quite wonderful. But, of course, she only put ten shillings on each, and got a very short price, as they made Hereward a hot favourite at the last. Still she won three pounds ten altogether." Then Nell began to be aware that Cecil was frowning at her vigorously, her voice faltered, and the confidences concerning her sister's winnings died away into a confused silence.

"Ahem! Do you mean to say that your sisters go to races?" inquired Mrs. Torrens with a chilly severity, looking at her across the tea table.

"Always, when they can get a chance of going," replied the girl a little defiantly.

"And when they go *they bet*, I understand?"

"Certainly! it isn't much fun going to races unless you do!" And Nell's heart thumped hotly and almost audibly, and there was a glitter that was not of peace in her beautiful eyes. Secretly she herself often deplored Dottie's betting habits, but now she would have stood by her to the death.

"And you? I suppose you also join in this ladylike and honourable amusement?" inquired Mrs. Torrens with withering scorn.

"No, no!" cried Cecil, rushing to the rescue. "Nell never bets or goes to races, do you, Nell? I don't believe you have ever been to a race in your life, have you? But we will go to Ascot some day, Nell, when we are married."

He took her hand a prisoner and clenched it hard within his own, to give her courage, and Nell, for his sake, curbed her temper and answered him with a smile :

"No, Cecil, that is quite true. I have never been to a race-

course, but that is because I don't really care to go, it would not amuse me. I shall like, however, to go to Ascot with you."

"It is to be hoped that you do not go because you do not approve of such places, my dear, and I do not think Cecil would be at all wise in taking you to races," said Mrs. Roscoe severely, "although with her husband a lady may certainly go anywhere—that is a very different thing." And Nell was discreet, and held her tongue.

No, it had not been a success—not in the least! As they walked away together from the house in Rutland Gate, when it was over, Cecil was in the very lowest depths of depression. For some moments neither of them spoke. Their way lay across Hyde Park, and the silence of a misty November evening enveloped them on every side as they emerged from the noisy streets into the Park. It was not till then that either of them said a word. All at once, under cover of the darkness, Nell slipped her hand shyly into her lover's.

"Dear Cecil," she murmured. "I am so sorry!"

She had never been so near to loving him as at this moment. She seemed to realize that he was suffering, and for her sake, and that he had sympathized with her, and the perception of this brought her very near to him.

"Never mind, I don't feel it very badly," she continued consolingly.

"Oh, Nell, how good you are!" he answered brokenly. "I wanted it to turn out so well, and it has all been such a miserable failure."

"Never mind," said Nell once more; "it doesn't hurt me."

"You won't give me up, will you, Nell?"

"Oh, no. Why should I? After all, it concerns no one else, only ourselves," she added softly.

For a moment his good angel tempted him to say to her: "Then let us set every one else at defiance and be married at once;" but more prudent thoughts flocked upon him before he had found courage to say the words. If he was in love, he was also very cautious—the love was an extraneous affair, but the caution was ingrain. After all, he knew very little about her, and he had promised his mother to wait.

Her thoughts must have followed his very closely, for in the next moment she gave him an opening.

"Easter is a long way off, Cecil ; and you and I are never likely to care for each other more than we do at present."

For half a moment he was silent. If only he had been brave and trustful ; if only there had not been so many other influences warring within him against those rare impulses that should have taught him instinctively to believe in her. And then there was his mother. A good man—and Cecil was essentially good, despite the faults of his character—does not easily turn round on his mother ! Mrs. Roscoe has not figured in these pages in any very amiable light, but although it saddened him unspeakably that she should have gone against him in this, the most momentous question of his life, Cecil could not, for all that, forget the long years of affection that had preceded these last few stormy weeks—the tender love that had watched over him from infancy, the untiring patience, the self-sacrifice, the long days and nights when he had been ill, when she had watched by his sick bed and nursed him hand and foot with unflagging devotion. Can a good son forget all this, utterly and wholly ; even for the sake of the woman whom he hopes to make his wife ? Cecil at any rate was not one of those who could do so. He said to himself that his mother must come first, let who will be second.

"Easter does seem a long way off, dearest," he answered at last, and his answer was given with a sigh ; "but time passes very quickly, and much as I should have liked to be married at an earlier date, I cannot but bow to my mother's wishes ; one never does any harm by waiting a little, and perhaps you and she will learn to know one another better by that time ; I earnestly hope so."

"I would not reckon overmuch upon that hope, my dear boy," replied Nell with a little laugh, which in spite of her utmost efforts, was a trifle hard and scornful.

And then for some moments they walked on together in absolute silence.

There is not the woman born who does not resent coldness and calculation in her lover. If for one moment it is she who has made the advance, and he who has drawn back, then not all her affection for him will serve to wash out the humiliation of that position with regard to him. Nell, who was proud, and whose love was not strong enough to enable her to overcome her pride, felt the sting of the repulse bitterly and deeply.

For it is against nature and the rightful order of things that the man should be the one to draw back. It is from the woman's side that doubts and misgivings should arise ; from her that objections and delays ought to suggest themselves, and if Nell in a generous impulse of the moment, moved by no selfish passion, by no personal inclination, but simply by a desire to make things easier and better for them both, if she had for an instant reversed that natural *role* betwixt man and woman, was it not for him to have met her more than half way with grateful joy, and with an eager acceptance of her suggestion ?

But he had not done so. He had only talked calmly and deliberately about the advantages of delay, and the superior claims of his mother's wishes. A barrier, mountains high and hopelessly impassable, seemed to rise up all at once between them. The little *rapprochement* of heart that had drawn her so closely to him but a few moments ago vanished again into thin air ; they were wide as the poles asunder now. Even Cecil felt it vaguely and intangibly, with an uneasy sense in his mind that he had somehow put himself in the wrong with her.

"Why are women so unreasonable !" he said to himself almost with anger.

By this time they had reached the wide open space in the centre of Hyde Park. It was quite dark ; only far away to the north and to the east, the long lines of sickly gas lamps flickered palely yellow, through the faint mist which filled the air. There was no sky above, only a brown and murky atmosphere, whilst the outlines of the leafless trees pencilled themselves in inky blackness against the gloom. The muffled hum of the busy city beyond scarce broke the stillness with its distant murmur, only now and again the footstep of a pedestrian hurrying past them or coming rapidly nearer along the path, echoed ringingly with a weird distinctness through the silence of the November evening. It was a darkness that was not altogether dark, but was rather that semi-gloom that is neither night nor day, but to which the eye by degrees grows accustomed, and through which, after a time, it becomes possible to distinguish one object from another.

All at once Cecil spoke.

"Nell," he said, turning rather suddenly round to her and peering through the dusk into her face, "I wish you would set my mind at rest about something."

"What is it, Cecil?"

"You must not be angry with me, but there is something that haunts me—about you."

"About me!" she repeated wonderingly.

"Of course I know it can be nothing at all, dear; nothing but idle gossip—how could it be? I am so certain of that, so certain of you altogether, that I could stake my existence upon it. But, I suppose I am nervous and upset to-night, and if I could hear you say just once, that there was nothing in it, I think I should be happier."

"Suppose you tell me what it is you are alluding to," said Nell, a little hardly and coldly. "I am not a magician, and I cannot possibly guess what you mean. What is this gossip, pray?"

"Ah, that is just what I cannot tell you!" replied the young man with a little uneasy laugh; "and what is more, the man who spoke of it did not tell me either. Oh Nell! you must take me for a lunatic, to be so stupidly vague!"

"You are certainly somewhat incoherent," assented the girl drily, looking straight in front of her.

"It was only—" he went on lamely and awkwardly, after a moment's pause, during which he hoped in vain that she would question him and so make it easier for him, but she said nothing, so he was forced to flounder on unaided—"only a man I met one day at a club dinner, who was speaking of your grandmother. He said something about one of her granddaughters having got into some scrape, or adventure or other, with some man. But, of course, Nell, it could not be you, could it? Those sisters of yours are rather fast and flirty, as we both know, and I daresay it was one of them; I don't want in the least to pry into your sisters' private histories; it would not be my business at all; but if you could just tell me, Nell——"

"What am I to tell you? about Dottie and Millie's love affairs, do you mean?" her voice was singularly dull and lifeless.

"Oh no, no, Nell! why do you misunderstand me so? as if I cared about Dottie and Millie! they might have forty thousand lovers, it wouldn't signify a brass farthing to me. It is *you* that I care about—you that are so different to them—so sweet, so good, so true;" and then he came to a dead stop, and there was a silence.

"Well?" said Nell, presently, still in the same dull and uninterested voice. "We don't seem getting any nearer to it, do we? If you will tell me exactly what you wish me to say——"

"Oh, Nell, you are very hard to me; why can't you say it of your own accord? why can't you just say, 'Cecil, I swear to you that I never did a single thing in all my life that was wrong or sinful?' that is all I want."

"That would be rather a large order, wouldn't it?" she said with a little mirthless laugh, "seeing that we all confess ourselves to be miserable sinners every Sunday of our lives!"

"You know that is not what I mean in the very least! you are angry with me for my baseless suspicions, and you are just playing with me and trying to torture me. For God's sake be just to me; remember how many people there are who are ready to say horrid things just now, and who would be glad enough to put false impressions in my heart about you; but I believe in you, Nell, upon my soul, I do; only be good to me and say to me just once with your own lips: 'Cecil, there is nothing in my past life to be ashamed of, or that can ever be brought up against me, to bring the faintest shadow of disgrace upon my husband's name.' Say that to me of yourself, and as there is a God above us I will banish all these cruel doubts from my mind for ever."

For a few seconds again there was silence, and many things rushed through Nell's heart in a passionate tumult.

She would tell him nothing—nothing! he did not deserve her confidence; moreover the story was so long—and so ugly—so impossible to explain, he would never understand, he who was conventional and strait-laced in his ideas! Besides she had done no wrong; she might have been foolish but she had not been sinful—not even in thought—she had saved herself from the danger, and nobody had ever known of it. Ah! in the name of fortune how had this rumour got about? Had not her grandmother assured her that nobody would ever hear of it—that the grave would soon close over herself, the only one who knew the story—that to speak of it to Cecil would be foolishness, for that Vane Darley had disappeared and would never cross her path any more?

Why should she give herself away, then? and to this man of

all others, who would be so hard and so merciless to her childish fault?

And it had not been a sin, she could answer him in that, honestly and truthfully enough, if indeed it were worth her while to answer him at all.

And for one wild moment it came into her heart to rid herself of him for ever. He was suspicious and cautious; he was cold and he was strait-laced—she hated all these things, and she did not love him! Why should she not dismiss him at once and for ever from her life? Why not say to him now, at once and plainly:

“I have nothing to tell you, but you can go out of my existence and out of my heart. I do not love you enough to forgive you your cruel suspicions.”

But before she had spoken the words, she thought about her father and her sisters. What a horrible and unspeakable disappointment it would be to them all, were she to break off her engagement. How stupid, too, to give up her one chance of a better life—how great a mistake to throw away this rare opportunity of making a marriage that would be of the utmost benefit and advantage to them all; and more than all else, were she to answer his question in such a fashion, would it not be giving to him a tacit admission of the things he had brought up against her? This last consideration turned the scale. She could not confide wholly in him; she did not dare to leave him with that unanswered question on his lips.

So, like many another woman before her, Nell Forrester took the middle way of reticence and discretion; of half truth, that is not truth at all. Yet she told him no lie; she perjured her soul by no false oath; she adhered strictly at least to the letter, if not to the spirit of the truth.

“My dear Cecil,” she said to him quietly, “you are exciting yourself very foolishly, still I am quite ready to swear to you that there is nothing I have ever done in all my life that can bring disgrace upon you, or shame upon myself. Will that content you?”

He seized her hand and pressed it gratefully between his own.

“My dearest Nell, I knew it, I knew it!” he cried gladly and earnestly. “God bless you for those words. Now nothing, not even the shadow of evil, can ever come between us again.”

And as he spoke the words, the tall figure of a man passed close to them in the darkness. He half turned as he went by, and the dull light of the murky sky struck for a second upon his pale face and wasted frame.

Nell saw him perfectly.

It was Vane Darley.

(To be continued.)

Mashonaland.

A SETTLER'S VIEW OF THE SITUATION.

By G. GORDON SAMSON.

MASHONALAND! Every one was talking about it at the Cape when I left in the middle of October. It was "Mashonaland" if you met a man in the street; it was "Lobengula" if you went into a restaurant; "the Matabele" in church; the "Mashona" in the markets; "the Chartered Company" (which, translated into English, reads, "The Chartered British South Africa Company") in Capetown; "the Bechuanaland police" at Port Elizabeth; and Mr. Cecil Rhodes everywhere. Besides these general headings for referring to the main topic, there were many others of less frequent recurrence, such as Sir Henry Loch, the volunteers (to say nothing of the recruiting sergeant), Khama, the rains, the bad roads, Martini-Henri rifles, obstructed telegraphic communication, and a host of other minor details.

For the moment Cape Colony has been entirely swallowed up by the British South Africa Company, and Mashonaland alone remains on the board to attract the attention of the world. Natal is forgotten; the German territories have disappeared; the Portuguese lands seem, for the nonce, never to have existed; only Mashonaland remains. And now the clever cook is placing Matabeleland on the dish as well, lest the mind should become surfeited with too much of a good thing.

The strange part about Mashonaland is that you will never find any two people who exactly agree on the causes of the present troubles; what led up to them, and what should be, or should have been done, to alleviate them. Both in England and at the Cape each person holds some view of the matter peculiar to himself. He goes about telling every one he meets all about this peculiar view, and he listens to all about every one else's peculiar views, and wonders why no one else holds his peculiar view, since it is the right one. But he does not quarrel about it;

he merely sticks to his own idea. I never met a man who quarrelled about Mashonaland: they all discuss it. I am the only man I ever met that did not hold any views whatever about Mashonaland, or the "Question," or the "Situation;" and I think it was a mistake not to do so, because for a little while I got confused among the multiplicity and peculiarities of every one else's views; but I wanted to keep my mind open. I have kept it open to the last, even after returning to England and hearing Mr. Labouchere, the apostle of the Matabele, recount, in vivid oration, the woes of Lobengula, that most innocent and truthful of all guileless savages; the oppression and cruelty of the Chartered Company; its high-handed arrogance in refusing to deliver up Mashona to be executed by the above guileless barbarian; the wickedness of its evil promoters; its nearness to bankruptcy; and a thousand other convincing details.

I had heard the "views" of men who had been in the pioneer expedition to Mashonaland and of those who knew nothing about the country. I had talked with the directors of gold mining companies (or of companies reputed by some to possess mines or claims in Mashonaland), with merchants, with hunters, with fat Dutchmen and "canny Scots;" in fact, with everybody that I came across I had conversed on this universal topic—Mashonaland. Then I went on board a steamer at Port Elizabeth and told myself that I would say good-bye to Mashonaland and the stories of the fever, and the lions, and the gold, until I reached England. But it was not to be. Exactly opposite to me at table sat a man who was just down from Mashonaland, having come by way of Delagoa Bay, and was going to Cape Town. He had been in the country since it was first opened up, and knew what a newspaper reporter would describe as "every inch of it" (there are only a few billions of individual inches in every square mile).

Of course there was no help for it, so I attacked the man at once about Mashonaland (well knowing that if I did not attack him he assuredly would attack me), and posed as a person whose acquaintance with Mashonaland and its affairs was limited to not more than half-an-hour's perusal of some of the current literature on the subject. And this is how I opened the campaign, and what he told me:

"What do you think will be the end of the present trouble?"

I said—I felt that there was no need to say what trouble I meant.

“Difficult to say,” he answered. “The Chartered Company are drafting men into the country, but it is getting so late now that nothing more is likely to be done till the next dry season. The rains generally commence in November and last till March, and little or nothing can be done while they are on. In the end I should not wonder if the whites wipe out the Matabele.”

“What do you think of Lobengula?” I inquired.

“Ah! Lo Ben. will give them trouble,” answered the settler. “Lo Ben. is a very long-headed fellow, and it will take Cecil Rhodes all his time to manage him. Mr. Rhodes thinks that he can do what he likes with him; but this is not the case. I tell you,” he continued, “that the whole matter is very difficult and complicated. Lo Ben. is, from his point of view, perfectly in the right. He punished the Mashonas, for some offence, by sending an impi, which attacked them and killed a large number, burning their kraals, and otherwise devastating the country in the neighbourhood of Victoria. He looks upon the Mashonas as his slaves, and if they fail to obey his orders he thinks he may do as he likes with them. But civilization takes a different view of the matter.

“The history of the present troubles, and what led up to them, is very simple. Before the Chartered Company was formed, envoys, exploiters—call them what you like—were sent into the country to arrange terms with Lobengula. He granted the concession of the mining rights of the country to the new company, while reserving to himself his old rights of governing his subjects, and levying taxes on them as he had done before. Now the Mashonas were all his property—slaves taken in war—and it was their duty to do all the agricultural work, rear the cattle, and so on. If they failed to do this he punished them in his own way.

“A great number of Mashonas live on the borders of Matabeleland, on Matabele farms, rearing the cattle, and doing all the agricultural and manual work—the Matabele themselves being just a nation of fighting men. The Mashonas who live in Mashonaland proper are expected to pay tribute. When, however, they found that the English had taken up a strong position

in their country, they shook off the yoke of the Matabele, and determined to obey them no longer. The Matabele, on the other hand, made up their minds to force them into obedience; thence the present troubles. This is the whole story in a nutshell."

"There is no fight in a Mashona, is there?" I inquired.

"No," he said, "the Matabele have taken all the spirit out of them. But they will fight amongst themselves, especially if there are a few whites around to back them up. Gad! sir, they will fight then!

"The Matabele, however, are a thoroughly warlike race. They have great military kraals, just like so many barracks, established throughout the country, where the fighting men live in a state of constant discipline. Each of these kraals will contain about a thousand men, and they are thoroughly drilled and well equipped."

"But where do they get their weapons from?"

"The Chartered Company made them a present of a thousand Martini-Henri rifles."

"A thousand Martini-Henri rifles!" I exclaimed in utter astonishment. "What on earth did they do that for?"

"For a bribe," said my companion, amused at my surprise. "Besides the Martini-Henri they have all sorts and descriptions of rifles; the Winchester repeating, the Snider, and every other description of weapon imaginable. In fact, if you meet a hundred Matabele, you will most likely find ten different sorts of rifles amongst them. You see, the traders have been up there for the last fifty years. They have lots of ammunition too, and I tell you they are careful of it. Why, man, a Matabele would not fire a shot unnecessarily for five shillings."

I asked him if he considered the Matabele an aggressive race.

"No," he said. "I have travelled all amongst them, and I never found them so. In fact, I never heard of a Matabele touching a white man, or harming him in any way. They only attack the Mashona, whom, as I said before, they consider their slaves.

"The Matabele is generally a great powerful fellow, as large and as strong as a Zulu. He is very proud and easily takes offence, so that you have to be very careful in dealing with him, for if you offend him he is quick to show his resentment, and is

not in the least afraid of you, either. But in travelling in Matabeleland I have always found that the natives would give you everything you wanted, if you went the right way to work with them."

"There seems, from all I can gather," I said, "to be a strange system of land tenure up there. One cannot buy a piece of land right out unless one lives on it either personally or by agent for a certain number of years, I understand."

"Yes, that is so. As a matter of fact, the Chartered Company hardly possesses the right of granting land, you see. When they obtained their concessions from Lobengula they bargained for the mining rights, which were to be granted to them on condition that they paid £100 a month to Lo Ben. An Irish lawyer, one of the ablest men out here, was sent up to draw out the deeds and get them signed. Lo Ben. of course had an interpreter, and in due course signed the deeds—in whatever way he may have done that. But he was vastly surprised when he found that the Chartered Company had established themselves in Mashonaland with a force of five hundred police, and thoroughly taken possession of the country.

"Undoubtedly in the end there will be fighting—probably in the next dry season. In the meantime Lo Ben. will carry on negotiations with the Government at home; and I think myself that in the end he will consent to come under Imperial protection."

"And now tell me about the natural features of the country," I said, as we lighted another cigarette. "I suppose it is very tropical as regards its vegetation; there are doubtless many palms, orchids, bananas and such things, are there not?"

"No," he said, "there is nothing tropical at all about the country in the way you mean. No palms, or canes, or bamboos, or anything of that sort. It is a very barren-looking country—much the same as it is down here. Of course it is intensely hot, but the country is mostly barren. There are large tracts just covered with long grass, and, again, others with short brushwood, and there are huge swamps. The mountains are of granite, but in the rainy season—for it seems to be raining all the time up there for several months out of the year—they too are covered with all sorts of vegetation. The bush is just ordinary open bush, growing about twenty or thirty feet high, and has

not any of the tropical features about it that you mentioned just now."

"There is a lot of game of all sorts up there, is there not?" I inquired.

"Yes, there are plenty of animals; but you have to look for them. When you get up to the Zambesi, and all over the plain to the north of it, you find yourself amongst all sorts of game. That is the place for animals and no mistake. But there are great mosquitos up there which bite terrifically. Why, man, you sometimes meet with mosquitos almost as big as this cigarette"—and he held out the half-smoked weed.

"Ah," I said—we were both laughing by this time—"you may make me believe a good deal, but that is a little too tall!"

"No, but truly, I have sometimes seen them nearly as long as a blue-bottle fly, though of course not so stout. They don't attack those who have been in the country some time, like myself, but they fasten on to the new-comers. I was travelling with a young fellow up there some time ago, and one night they bit him tremendously, giving him no peace at all. In the morning he showed the bites to me. 'Well,' he said, 'I suppose I will have to be bathing these wounds.' 'What, Pat,' I exclaimed, 'these are never mosquito bites? Why, man, a mosquito could not bite like that!' 'Bite, man,' he replied; 'they bite like lions.'"

Of course every one who has been in Mashonaland has come across lions, for the whole country teems with them. My companion told me that just before he left Victoria a lion had been shot within fifty yards of the town.

"They will not touch you if you are alone," he said, "but if you have anything with you—horses or mules or oxen—they will set on you at once.

"The first time that I met a lion that was at all inclined to attack me was one morning when I was walking along in the cold grey twilight, before sunrise.

"I was going on ahead, and the wagon was following me at a short distance. I noticed the foot-prints of a lion in the long grass, but did not take much heed of them, believing them to be those of a very large dog belonging to a party that had gone on some way ahead of us.

"Suddenly I heard a terrific growling coming from somewhere in the long grass not far from where I was. I stopped and looked all around me to see if I could discover any traces of the animal—for the echo makes it impossible for you to locate the sound at all—and I spotted a tuft of long grass, about thirty yards behind me, where I thought the lion must be. Presently a lioness rose from here, and came with great bounds right past where I was standing, and then stopped about thirty yards from me. I turned round and confronted her, and we stood looking each other full in the face. I had my rifle all ready, and took aim, and waited, wondering if I could hit her. I knew I had my one chance, and after that it was her turn, for if you fail to kill a lion, though you may put ten shots into it and mortally wound it, Gad, sir! it will come up and kill you.

"I made up my mind that my best plan was to wait till the wagon came up, so as soon as it was near enough I halloed out to the natives that there was a lioness in front; and when they came up I got into the wagon, and we all fired from there; but the shots missed and the lioness cleared away."

"What do you think of the climate of Mashonaland?" I said. "Some people have told me it was very fine."

"Really," he answered, "it is sinful to think of the lies that are told about the climate of Mashonaland, and the country itself, in order to induce people to go up there. It is a miserable climate, and the fever is terrible. I have seen fifty per cent. of the people at Victoria carried off by it last year. It is not a thing that injures you permanently if you get it, but it is very liable to carry you off. Strength and a good constitution do not protect you, for the strongest man may be laid quite low with it in twenty-four hours. Your hands become almost transparent; you can count every bone in them. I have had it myself for three months; but when I once got over it I got quite strong again in a fortnight. You eat ravenously when you get rid of it, and I have put on as much as two pounds in weight a day when I was recovering. To have had it once is no protection against having it again. Whenever it comes round it is sure to give you a call. I had an attack of it in Delagoa Bay, coming down from Mashonaland this time, but I had a good doctor, and I have got rid of it now."

"What class of people does the population of Mashonaland

consist of?" I inquired. "Are they mostly employed by the mining companies?"

"I can soon tell you what class of people they are up there," he answered. "In the first place, almost every one is connected, more or less, with the Chartered Company. This company itself employs a good many people in one way and another—chiefly in the Mashonaland police. Then all the other companies—the mining and prospecting concerns—which employ the rest of the people, are dependent upon the Chartered Company; so that you may say that the Chartered Company has almost every one in the country more or less at its beck and call. Many old Cape Colonists went up to Mashonaland when it was first opened up, but finding what the life and prospects were, they soon came down again. Now almost all the people are young fellows newly out from England, who know what the life there is, and perhaps have friends who have come out here and are doing well. Thus the population of Mashonaland is a very raw one.

"They live very wildly up there, you know. Every one gets mad with the gold fever; and the gold fever is a very thirsty thing. You may talk of drink, but, man, I never saw anything like what it is up there! The people literally go mad.

"Living, too, is very expensive. The cheapest article costs a shilling, and that is a packet of cigarettes. Drinks are a shilling and eighteen pence each—sometimes three shillings when they are scarce. Everything else is in proportion, so that although pay is high, there is little margin, and the people don't make enough to carry them out of the country. Besides, being, as I said, a raw set, unused to life at the Cape, they would have difficulty in getting work if they did leave Mashonaland and go into one of the other states.

"Quite recently I was employed by one of the gold mining companies near Victoria to oversee the men. They were a capital set of fellows, and I never had any fault to find with the way they behaved themselves or did their work. Suddenly the news of the Matabele trouble arrived, and in three days every man at the mine had become utterly demoralized; they one and all got drunk, and from being quiet, sensible human beings, they were suddenly transformed into lunatics.

"When I left Victoria, in the middle of September, no one was doing any work. Every one was waiting to see how the Matabele trouble would end."

"The newspapers would lead us to believe that almost every one in Mashonaland is under arms," I said.

"Yes," he replied, "that is quite right. I was under arms myself for a fortnight before I left Victoria.

"Well, I was telling you of the way in which some of these fellows go on. I used to know two of the wildest of them, named MacMac and Spink. MacMac lived in a hut near mine, and one day he got the fever. I went in to see him, and found him swearing the most awful oaths—terrible oaths, man, in a regular string, one after the other, just for amusement.

"Presently a minister of religion came in, and heard MacMac swearing away in this style. Then he began to talk to him of fever and death and such things, and told him that if he went on swearing in that way he would go to hell most assuredly. MacMac listened to him for a little while without seeming to pay any attention. Then suddenly laying hold of a boot: 'There will be two of us going there shortly, unless you clear, I am thinking,' he exclaimed.

"The minister did clear.

"This MacMac was a great athlete and acrobat, I should have told you, and a good while before *this*, when the whites had come to a conference with Lobengula, he came up amongst the rest.

"The Matabele chief sat in state, surrounded by his attendants, and the whites came up to do homage to him.

"When MacMac's turn arrived, he came running up, and turning a great somersault, arrived in the middle of the circle.

"'How do you like that, old fellow?' he said, but of course the mighty Lo Ben. did not understand a word of what he was talking about. Then he turned a somersault to the right and afterwards another to the left, and then turning towards his white friends: 'I think the old beggar likes it,' he said.

"After the performance was over Lo Ben. declared that this man must be a chief amongst the whites, because he could use not only his limbs, but his tongue."

Then I turned the conversation in the direction of the gold resources of the country.

"Yes," he said, "there is gold in the country—I think there is a lot of gold in it ; but the man who will find it is the tanned and weather-beaten prospector, the man who has been at the business all his life ; for it takes a great deal of experience to make a successful prospector, mind you, and the raw emigrants who have just come into the country are no good at all for this kind of work. On the other hand, the old prospector goes into the country with the assurance that if there is gold there, he will find it."

To V—— b——

I.

AS thy name, Violet, so thine eyes
Before the long dark lashes sweep,
Like sudden cloud o'er summer skies,
Across their meaning surface-deep.

II.

Yet, have I learnt it? In that book
I skimmed through in an idle hour
Mayhap my sullen whim mistook
The tenderness for devil power?

III.

God grant that I have been deceived!
God give the love my hope denied!
Or in the night that she conceived
Who bare me, would the world had died!

IV.

I loved you. Now I read your eyes
And find a hidden meaning there.
I love you. Ere the love-light dies
Kiss me, and listen to my prayer.

J. R. L. R.

Judge Not.

IN TWO PARTS.

By MRS. BOYSE,
Author of "THAT MOST DISTRESSFUL COUNTRY," etc.

PART II.

ONCE more in the country the roses blossomed, refreshed by soft airs and balmy dews.

And in the city their tender petals were ruthlessly pierced with sharp wires lest they should fall prematurely before they had ministered to the caprices of the public, which is not prone to undue softness towards flowers or fellow-creatures.

Lilian Pomeroy, like the roses, had lived in the sweet country sunshine a free, innocent, careless life; her greatest triumph to pose as the queen of a rustic merry-making, her throne of fragrant hay, her sceptre and crown of fresh roses.

Dolores, the dancer, had become the talk of London from her beauty, grace and untiring energy.

Her picture was in every shop and newspaper; she was the idol of the hour: who cared how miserable she might be as long as she could amuse the world?

Her natural dramatic instinct had rendered her invaluable to her employers; for not only could she dance to perfection, but improvised new dances, which others vainly strove to copy.

Nightly she exhibited herself to the public gaze, and the excitement of her success braced her as the wires do the rose leaves, though for all that the girlish heart ached bitterly sometimes, when she thought of the old perfect love and happiness of the lovely Devonshire home life, and of the gentle mother who lived on happy in her delusion, and would have died rather than live on her daughter's earnings had she known. But it was so easy to deceive her! She and Jael believed their darling safe and sheltered; not, of course, in her aunt's home, but with a yet kinder friend.

Nightly as these fond ignorant women prayed for their child and slept peacefully afterwards, she was baring her fair neck and

arms, and performing feats of skill and strength, to dazzle and attract the eyes of men. And between the scenes and afterwards she was hardened now to the bold words and glances which had made her shrink and tremble at first like a scared bird.

So far, however, she was pure as when she lisped her prayers at her mother's knee in childhood. Of course, no one believed it; men repulsed sharply, went off and whispered away her good name at their clubs.

Women still received in society, though their intrigues were shameless and open, lamented the male depravity in admiring such an immodest creature. They saw no beauty in her.

Lady Delamode, shaking the luxuriant hair just come from Bond Street, marvelled why Dolores should wear such an obvious wig. Quite absurdly overdone, don't you know!

And Mrs. Passay, carefully seated in a shaded corner, and happy in the (mistaken) belief that her last discovery in flesh tints was undetectable, assured her audience that Dolores was enamelled not only all over her face, neck and arms, but actually to the knee. Yes, it was quite true; done on purpose for special parts.

They could not even give such a lost soul credit for possessing a fair skin and abundant hair, much less morals.

Dolores neither knew nor cared what was said.

Her one intensely strong feeling was for her mother; it took the place of the religion which had died in her heart when those who professed it would give her no help in her hour of need. Her lover had proved unfaithful, and she believed no more in love.

Kit, the girl who had helped her without thought of return, was left far behind in the lower ranks of the profession, never likely to rise, but to her Dolores was always a faithful friend; and the cripple, Betty, whose temper was soured by much pain, adored her with a strange, passionate, dog-like fidelity.

The sisters' little room was full of nice things now. Betty had flowers, a comfortable chair and a good supply of fruit and other delicacies; but most of all she prized the company of the girl who was her idea of perfection, and Dolores spent many an afternoon with her when Kit was off for one of the cheap outings

with her Bill, which were their greatest bliss ; noisy, jolly, vulgar excursions enough, but enjoyed as Dolores longed to enjoy anything again. She went to many entertainments, often given specially for her ; river picnics, coaching parties, suppers, and all seemed flat, stale and boring.

A new piece was to be produced, and in this Dolores felt some interest.

Its author adored her, a young clever man, unable for lack of interest and money to push himself, till chance threw him in Dolores' way ; and carried away by passion, he wrote a dainty poetic sketch, full of tender music, with a wonderfully catching lilt in it. Dolores, his inspiration, was of course heroine, a fairy princess, who left her elfland kingdom for love of a mortal ; and at this point Dolores, being consulted, suggested the idea of the end : the fairy, becoming a ballet girl, should be deserted by her lover, and in the last scene die in the snow, dancing, for the last time, to the sound of his wedding music. The whole was a daring mixture of romance and pathos ; sweet, sad, pathetic airs and words, sharply and racily contrasted by slangy, ringing, popular ditties.

A very experimental piece ; the cautious manager had his doubts about it, but Dolores threw herself into it heart and soul. She could give the author no love, but she might give him success—and she liked him.

The curtain rose on Fairyland, an exquisitely designed scene, with graceful dances and revels of well-trained fairies—ethereal beings whose gambols were disturbed by the arrival of a mortal of the most modern type, who presently began to teach them breakdowns and street songs.

Clever, certainly : smart dialogue, tuneful music ; but it failed to "catch on ;" the night was sultry, the audience languid.

The man who wrote it wiped his white face and felt sick and nervous. The man who had speculated in it grew worried and savage. Dolores was five minutes late. It dragged visibly—there was a faint hiss ; the manager cursed, not loudly, but with a will, and just then Dolores slipped by him, and giving him a saucy nod as she passed, floated slowly forward to the music of a soft, dreamy, languorous strain, seemingly supported by her cloudy opaline glistening draperies, which she wound and unwound like wreaths of mist about her lovely face and form. Sweeter and

more plaintive grew the music, and Dolores, pausing, sang a kind of simple short ballad to its accompaniment.

Her voice, though not very strong, was sweet and true; the rhyming words, if of little poetical merit, were tastefully set, and the singer gave expression to them as she described how love, being unknown in elfland, one thing was lacking to make it perfect.

A glass was steadily fixed on her as she sang by a man in the balcony, with sandy hair and beard, who resembled a German professor, and when he lowered it he rubbed his hands triumphantly.

The soft strains died away lingeringly, the singer retreating as she sang till the last notes were heard from behind a group of tropical flowers. Then suddenly the orchestra, with a crash of the instruments, burst into a mad ringing melody which thrilled every pulse, set heads moving and feet quivering to its tantalizing fascinating strain; and Dolores flashed out once more, freed from the cloudy draperies which she had used so effectively, and glistening in a jewelled dress. Coloured lights falling on her as she skimmed, circled and bounded in her rapid bewildering dance, she appeared now as if clad in rubies, which turned again to sapphires or emeralds; and moved to thorough enthusiasm, the audience applauded her with such warmth and eagerness as had rarely been surpassed, or even equalled, since the theatre was built.

From the occupants of the royal box to the costers in the back of the gallery, every one united to applaud her, and Dolores was for once moved to triumphant satisfaction at her own success, as behind the scenes the author, beside himself with rapture, kissed her hand kneeling, and the manager spoke with a warmth hitherto unknown.

There was no fear of failure now. Roused and sympathetic, the audience followed each scene and noted every point, laughing at the comic parts, the smart allusions, songs and repartees: interested as the plot developed, and the lover grew faithless to his fairy princess for the sake of a charmer of the *mondaine* order, likewise a dancer.

Poetry and prose, romance and its opposite, were cleverly contrasted in the dainty gracious fairy and her slangy, devil-may-care, reckless rival.

The scenes "In Stageland" were original, and took the public fancy.

Dolores had never before played a part which brought out more than her powers of dancing. In this quaint sketch she showed herself capable of passion and pathos, as she saw her lover being gradually stolen from her, and with him the hopes of heaven, only accessible to fairies through a mortal's love—a fanciful idea, which many in the audience appreciated.

The last act showed a gorgeous wedding entertainment. The rival was a bride; and then changing to the outside of the house, to the sound of the gay music within, Dolores appeared, and sang, to a waltz tune, a sad, haunting strain:

Heaven's gates are closed to me
 Since my love proved untrue,
 Earth's joys are dead to me
 Since my love ceased to woo.

Yet in my dreams I still
 Fancy him once more true,
 Feel his lips pressed to mine,
 As when he used to woo.

Prayer from my lips is vain,
 Or with my latest breath
 For my false love I'd plead,
 True unto him till death.

And as once more a wildly brilliant melody rang out, and the gay couples could be seen whirling to its spirited notes, Dolores, with one sad, wailing, heartrending cry, sank down into the snow, and for a minute or two the fast-falling flakes fell on her; then the curtain suddenly and unexpectedly dropped.

There was a pause, and immediately after, rounds of vociferous applause fell with welcome sound on the ears of all concerned in the piece.

It had thoroughly taken the public fancy, and was well launched.

In the dress circle a man had entered late, and showed little interest in the acting till the light fell on Dolores in her last pathetic farewell.

Then leaning forward with a start he gazed eagerly, and turning to a stranger, said abruptly:

"Excuse me, who is that girl?"

"That one in front? oh, Dolores, the dancer. She is doing uncommonly well; no one knew she could act in this style: we're all accustomed to connect her with leg pieces—ballet, you know; but this is awfully good, isn't it?" returned the stranger pleasantly, mentally summing up his interrogator as "A fellow from abroad smitten all of a heap."

"I see she is called 'Dolores,' but I fancied you might know more about her. I am just come from India and quite out of the swim," said "the fellow" politely.

"I should be delighted to tell you if I did, but she's—well, just a dancer; no one thinks much of their real names. Some one told me she was a German Jewess, but I fancy she looks English. Quite the rage just now; lots of fellows swear she favours them: most of them are lying, I believe."

And with a civil salutation the men left the theatre and went their ways, and the one just from India found a telegram at his club to Captain Trevelyan, begging him to go on at once to Homburg, as his father was ill and could not return to town yet.

So he went next day and attended dutifully on the iron-grey man, who was out of health and unamiable; and still thinking of Dolores. Dick inquired of his mother if she knew where Lilian Pomeroy was.

"Lilian; oh, my dear, she was adopted by a rich aunt, and married—at least was engaged, and I think—I am sure—married a colonial bishop or something, in a very short time," said Lady Matilda, who was not specially accurate, and a great gossip.

"Who told you?" persisted Dick.

"Let me see—oh, I know; it was Miss Twoddley, and she knows the Sionleys very well, and they are very intimate with Mrs. Middington Stoney, and she was Squire Pomeroy's sister, not by the same mother, or stay—was it father?" And Lady Matilda prosed on to indifferent ears, for Dick felt convinced that it was but a chance resemblance that had startled him.

However, he asked Miss Twoddley, a toady of Lady Matilda's, who was also in Homburg, and she assured him that Lilian was married, solacing her conscience by the fact that the archdeacon certainly was (for he had speedily consoled himself), and Miss Twoddley really did not know who his wife was, but remembered that the Trevelyans objected to Lilian.

So Dick, after the masculine fashion, began to flirt with a smart American, whose father had made a colossal fortune in pork, and though he cared nothing for her, he took her fancy, and being a young lady of strong will she determined to marry the handsome young soldier, who had already achieved distinction.

Dolores had not been recognized with certainty by her lover, but Mr. Middington Stoney's eyes were sharp enough, for he it was who, disguised as a German professor, had been in the gallery on the opening night of the new piece.

Next day he called on her and, throwing off his ordinary hypocrisy, told her plainly that he must profit by his discovery.

"Pray may I ask how?" inquired Lilian drily.

Mr. Stoney looked at her and saw that he had made a false move. Lilian had been an inexperienced nervous girl; Dolores was a cold, determined woman.

"My lovely one," he said, endeavouring to slip an arm round her, "you were fond of me once; your aunt is excellent, certainly, but unsympathetic; let me find in you a kindred soul." Then as there was no response he fancied in his inordinate vanity that she was yielding, and painted seductive pictures of secret meetings, trips to Paris and other stolen pleasures.

Dolores turned on him with superb passion at last.

"Out of my sight, you infamous wretch. How dare you insult me thus?"

"Insult you," sneered Mr. Stoney; "such creatures as you can hardly be insulted. Dolores, the dancer! Dolores, the notorious——"

The coarse epithet remained unspoken, for beside herself with anger, Dolores snatched up a riding whip and struck him sharply across the mouth with it.

"If I were what you believe me, which I am not," she cried, "I should be degraded indeed to stoop to such as you, a cur who, under the garb of piety, is utterly vile; a contemptible coward who has not the courage to have even the one redeeming quality of frankness."

"I will have you up for assault," raved Mr. Stoney; "you shall be dragged through the police courts."

"Do so if you like," retorted Dolores, cooling down and speaking steadily; "your wife will be pleased to learn you go to

theatres, which she denounces as hell's antechambers, and that her niece is Dolores, the dancer."

The chance shot about the theatre told.

"You did not see me. No one will believe that I was at the theatre," said Mr. Stoney hastily. "In fact I was not there."

"Save yourself more lies," said his niece coldly, "and leave the room at once, or I shall ring for my landlord to turn you out; he is a strong man."

Mr. Stoney rose, but pausing, said maliciously:

"I shall go to your mother and talk with her about your sad and abandoned life."

A sudden pang seemed to contract Lilian's heart; she had not thought of this possibility.

"If you dare to molest her," she cried, "I will go at once to my aunt."

"She would not believe you," answered Mr. Stoney with a laugh; "such women as you are not credited."

"How much money will silence you?" exclaimed the girl passionately; "you hinted just now that you would share my earnings."

Mr. Stoney deliberated a moment. Revenge on this girl who had scorned him so cuttingly was sweet, but he wanted money badly to silence importunate creditors, and his wife had been less willing of late to provide him without awkward questions.

"It is more Christian to forgive," he said impressively, "and your money were better in my hands than squandered by you in wantonness of life. I will use it in furthering the cause of righteousness, and pray for your speedy conversion."

Surprised at his change of tone, Dolores, who had been unlocking a desk, turned sharply. A middle-aged man had entered quietly, carrying some lovely flowers: a very aristocratic, well-dressed personage, whose small keen eyes took the position in at a glance.

"What are you doing, my dear?" he said to Dolores. "Take my advice, don't give a halfpenny to further any cause; public charities are the cause of half the crime in the world."

"Sir, you are a blasphemer, an infidel, I fear," said Mr. Stoney. "Do you read your Bible?"

"I remember a text about a class who, for a pretence, made long prayers; they seem to have existed in all ages. Money

given to public charity is wasted in guzzling and drinking by a set of greedy committee men, who then pocket most of the residue, and the wretched people the money should have helped are left to starve, or insulted by miserable doles."

"This is not a public charity," said Dolores quietly. "I wish to save a poor blind widowed lady from suffering."

"Eh! a blind lady? What's the trouble, Dolores? Just let me hear the story," persisted the new-comer. "If she is poor, you take her the money yourself, my good child; never send it by a third person. If it's anything else, let me see to it; I shall not steal your notes nor blackmail the poor lady."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I should?" stammered Mr Stoney in a fury.

"I only said that I should not, sir," responded the other. "If it be a mere matter of almsgiving, you cannot object to this lady choosing for almoner whom she thinks fit."

"It must be given to this person," said Dolores, "or there will be trouble to the lady and to me, Lord ——"

She paused, not liking to use his name before Mr. Stoney. He finished her sentence by adding quietly:

"Porthleven."

Mr. Stoney threw up hands and eyes.

"Lilian Pomeroy!" he exclaimed. "Is this the society you affect? Are you aware that Lord Porthleven is a man of sin, separated by his infamous conduct from his wife? A dicer, a drinker, a frequenter of the company of immoral females of the lowest class?"

"Yes," returned Lord Porthleven briskly. "Exactly, and in that company he met you. Yes, sir," he continued sternly, "I know you now; you were dancing at a masked ball two nights ago, and your mask was knocked off in a fall; I was looking on and picked you up. Your partner was Floss Debelind; she wore spurs—Vivandière dress—and one cut your forehead in the *mêlée*. Yes, there is the scar."

Mr. Stoney was livid and gasping, he could hardly bring out a denial and say something about a cab accident.

Lord Porthleven smiled in an irritating way.

"Pray do not trouble yourself to explain to this young lady and myself. I can prove what I say; and if, sir, you are ever tempted to give my young friend here, or any other lady, trouble,

I will not only make that little matter public, but I will set on a sharp detective to follow up your tracks. Dolores, put up your note-case and permit me to have this gentleman shown out."

"Who is that fellow, and why was he blackmailing you, child?" asked Lord Porthleven coolly, as the door closed on the cowed hypocrite.

"His name is Middington Stoney," said Dolores slowly.

"Middington Stoney? Ah! to be sure, Middington was a stockbroker—worthy, honest man. I did business with him. Wife was an angular saint, and afterwards married a light of the religious world," remarked Lord Porthleven, who knew every one and had a wonderful memory. "Pah, what a cursed blackguard the scoundrel is. Well, he will not annoy you again, I fancy. It would put his candle out a bit if the other saints knew he went to places that are almost too bad for a sinner like myself. You have not told me what you were going to pay him to do or leave undone."

"No, Lord Porthleven, nor am I going to do so," replied Dolores firmly. "Are these roses for me? Thank you so much."

"Yes, they are, of course, as you will have nothing better, little fool that you are. What are you going to do to-day? Ride?

"No; practise a new dance that I have thought out, so I must send you away," said the girl with a laugh.

"You will work yourself to death; you had much better do as I ask you, little one. What does it matter to us if people talk? My wife did not choose to get a divorce; it's her pious way of paying me out, or I'd marry you to-morrow, but as I can't, I offer the best substitute in my power. A pleasant life, lots to spend, go where you like, have a good time, and something to live on when I go off the hooks, secured. Come, what do you say?"

"No, a thousand times no!" said Dolores, flushing crimson and turning white by turns.

"You're a silly girl; any other in your position would jump at the offer," said Lord Porthleven.

"Then give them the chance."

"Thanks, my dear; I happen to want you you silly, prudish

child, and I'll have what I want, too," replied Lord Porthleven rising.

"Never," said Dolores with emphasis.

"Never's a long day. Come, we won't quarrel. Good-bye."

Lord Porthleven went off and promptly investigated the history of the Pomeroy family; it was easy enough to place "Dolores," having learnt her real name, and a Devonshire friend told his lordship about the bank failure, and putting two and two together it did not take Lord Porthleven long to get a pretty good idea of what had driven Lilian Pomeroy to her present position, and to guess that her blind mother was kept in ignorance, and that Mr. Stoney endeavoured to put the screw on by threatening disclosure. And, anathematizing him once more, meditated as to how far his own plans would be furthered by the other's meanness.

Lord Porthleven was no saint. His wife had long been separated from him, and posed as a model of feminine perfection; perhaps, as people said, she was far too good for her ex lord and master. Marble statues are exquisite things in their way, but frail human nature is apt to weary of their stony charms and to sigh for mere flesh and blood. Lord Porthleven was no exception; he could have been kept faithful and devoted enough by a far less exalted type of womanhood: a creature with smiles and tears and coquettish ways, who would have flown in passions and scolded roundly, and made up the quarrel with kisses, and could have enjoyed fun and flirtation on her own account. Lady Porthleven was above frivolities; a beautiful intellectual being who moved through her world and went into society as a matter of duty, and remained superior to all that her sex usually appreciate. In short, a statue; and Lord Porthleven wanted a wife. So they parted, and he endeavoured to give her the chance of setting herself free, and she, having exalted ideas on the subject of divorce, and perhaps an undeveloped feminine weakness for revenge, would not move in the matter. And he was still in the eye of the law her husband, and cared little that he was bound, in fact declared it was a protection.

Now he had some faint longings for freedom. A girl's red-gold hair, dark eyes and creamy-white skin aroused his desire to be unfettered, and able to offer marriage instead of gilded dishonour. For, although he had for many years effectually stifled

his conscience and found nothing in the women he knew to awaken it, his instincts of manhood taught him to feel some respect for this lonely child, who was, according to her lights, doing her best to live a clean, honourable life, and to deny herself for her mother's sake, even while she deceived her.

Women were an easily read book to Lord Porthleven, and he had long known that Dolores lived simply, and could not be tempted by the luxuries which half her sex willingly barter their souls for.

There is more joy in the heart of man over one woman that resisteth than in the over-willing ninety-nine that fall to his wiles before they are really tempted; and Dolores was a prize worth some exertion. So day by day Lord Porthleven showed her such attention as he might have offered to a princess without offence.

Champagne dinners, showy trinkets, and the display which attracts the vulgar were not in his programme.

Dainty flowers, the occasional loan of a perfect riding horse for a pleasant canter, not in the park or streets, but from some remote country station in clover and hay scented lanes. Books, clever reviews or magazines, excursions on the river, and visits to pretty country places, where Lord Porthleven himself rarely appeared, but Dolores found everything planned for her to the most minute details. All this consideration naturally moved the girlish heart to warm gratitude. She began to believe Lord Porthleven a kind of second father, a true, disinterested friend.

The hot dusty season was wearing to an end, every one who could leave London began to "babble of green fields," or of smart country houses and fashionable watering places; but still the Frivolity was crammed to suffocation nightly, and Dolores as much an attraction as ever. The Lost Soul waltzes were played in every ball-room and warbled by every musical damsel. The saucy, lively songs from other scenes had long been reproduced on barrel organs and whistled by street boys; the piece was a success, and Dolores must appear, however sick of it all she might be. To relieve the monotony to herself she had invented fresh and original dances, with marvellous dresses which were part of the performance, and the cut and arrangement of the draperies a secret which was successfully kept, for the cripple Betty made them, and would have resisted any attempt

at bribery. Dolores had given her first-class lessons in dress-making, and she was delighted to carry out fresh ideas. The weeks went by and Dolores at length got a holiday, chiefly through Lord Porthleven's aid, and hastened down to the little cottage to her mother's arms.

She had counted the very hours, but the joy of the meeting was not what she had pictured so fondly, for in the worn delicate face her quick eyes saw serious change, and Jael when questioned confessed uneasiness as to Mrs. Pomeroy's health, though her fears took no decided form, and no doctor had been consulted.

Lilian lost no time in sending for the best local practitioner, who spoke pleasantly of trying weather, loss of tone, and mild tonics to Mrs. Pomeroy herself; and having reassured her till she was able to joke with him about her daughter's too-anxious affection and beg him to declare that her only ailment was being spoilt till she grew fanciful, the doctor left her, and taking Lilian out of earshot told her that he greatly feared that a serious, if not fatal and most painful, malady was impending.

He was a kindly man, and it was a hard task to break such news and see the girl's lovely face whiten, the dark eyes grow large with unshed tears, and the sweet red lips tighten with repressed feeling; but he held that the plain truth told concisely was most merciful, and when he had spoken Lilian asked a few questions quietly.

The doctor answered them, telling her that her mother's case would have been thought hopeless once, but modern science had devised means of cure by operation, and though the remedy was desperate perhaps, it had proved successful.

"Would you undertake it?" asked the daughter, with quivering lips.

"No, certainly not; in country practice one does not acquire the necessary experience, and, in fact, only one or two London and Parisian surgeons are competent," replied the doctor.

A few more questions elicited the names of these men of science, and the probable cost. Dr. Meadows had recently sent a patient to London who was cured by the treatment, and could give definite information, but thinking of the tiny cottage he had left he hinted that he could inquire as to hospitals taking such cases.

Lilian shook her head resolutely. . . .

“Dr. Meadows,” she said, “you see what my darling mother is—blind, fragile, utterly dependent on our old nurse. It would kill her to undergo such a terrible trial among strangers, however good and kind to her. I will get money somehow, and she shall be with Jael and myself.”

“It would be far better,” returned the doctor, marvelling in private how this slender pretty creature was going to find such a sum. The little cottage was very far from Pomeroy Manor, but still in the country people’s antecedents are known, and he, of course, knew the story of the Pomeroy’s and of their ruin; however, he only said warmly, holding the girl’s hand in a kindly clasp:

“Rely on me, Miss Pomeroy, for any help, advice, or, in short, anything. Write or come to me; I will do all in my power for yourself and your mother. Remember, I am not absolutely certain yet, so hope for the best.”

There was little doubt in his own mind as he rode away; and in a very short time Lilian, once more back at her weary work, her identity merged into that of Dolores, the dancer, received the verdict that made the painful doubt an agonizing certainty.

In her distress she went to her aunt’s house, determined to humiliate herself to any extent to obtain help, but was sternly refused admission by the sour maid, who did not even soften the refusal by saying her mistress was engaged, but bluntly assured Lilian that she was never to set foot in the house again.

Returning home the girl poured out her sorrows and fears in a piteous imploring letter to Mrs. Middington Stoney, but it was returned unopened.

A telegram, begging for an interview, received no answer.

It was hopeless, and in her despair she summoned Lord Porthleven, who came promptly from the country at her bidding.

Moved as he had never before seen her, she told him all her trouble, and with tearful eyes and quivering lips, ended by saying:

“I have no one to turn to as my aunt will not listen to me. Oh, Lord Porthleven, for the sake of all you ever held dear, do not you fail me too.”

“Calm yourself, my child,” he replied gently. “Your mother shall have all that money can give her. She must be brought at once to London and see this specialist, and afterwards, when

she is better, as you say the winters try her so, you shall take her away into some place of perpetual sunshine, and she will be stronger than ever, and never have another care or anxiety."

In an ecstasy of delight and gratitude Lilian threw herself at his feet and kissed his hands.

"How can I thank you? How can I repay you? I am promised a much higher salary, and the money I may soon return, but the goodness and kindness never, never, never!"

Lord Porthleven paused, his better feelings prompted him to give all without asking a return, but the girl was so lovely and winning, and he had long ceased to resist temptation. Drawing her to him he whispered:

"All this and much more will I do, Dolores, but only if you promise to give your sweet self to me."

"Anything but that," she cried, starting up hastily. "Let me repay you the money, be your servant, your debtor; and with my last breath I will bless you, but not that. Oh, don't ask that of me!"

"And why not?" asked Lord Porthleven. "I am too old for you, perhaps, my child, but my love is no mere boy's fancy. I can gratify every wish, and I swear that our union shall be till death, as much as if half-a-dozen priests had tied the knot. What more do you want?"

"Only peace of mind and honour," said Dolores gently. "What would my mother or any good, pure woman think of me if I acceded to your wishes?"

"Your mother need never know that our marriage, for it would be such in the sight of heaven, is not quite according to the rules invented by society. As for other women, is your aunt a sample of the Christianity which you believe in? Dolores, when you are my age you will see what a hollow sham self-righteousness is, and believe that there are truer forms of goodness than these canting religionists uphold."

Dolores shook her head and answered:

"I cannot argue, I am not clever enough, but I know right from wrong."

"Or think you do," said her companion. "Well, little one, I will leave you to consider whether, for a mere dogma and empty belief, you will let your mother suffer long-protracted torture and die an agonizing death; or whether you will trust your future to

a man who loves and respects you with all his heart, and will spare nothing to shield your mother from suffering, and leave no wish of your own unfulfilled. What will people say of us? Why, we will not ask. My yacht shall be our home, and we will spend our lives in lovely places where none will know or care, and my pearl shall be admired and fêted by every one, and your mother shall never again be parted from you."

It was a long speech for Lord Porthleven, but he was thoroughly in earnest, and having said his say, took his leave abruptly. And Dolores, throwing herself in the one armchair that her small room contained, sat thinking and thinking with white set face, heedless of the time, till her landlady, who was a good-hearted simple woman, came to warn her that it was late, and beg her to have some food before going to the theatre. Dolores could not eat, but drank some tea eagerly and thirstily. She had scarcely time to dress for her part, but her helper was prompt, and she hastened to the wings and paused there, looking with unseeing eyes straight before her; a picturesque figure in a marvellous costume, ready to charm the audience with her Thistle Down dance, a novelty of her own creation, which was voted her *chef d'œuvre*.

A voice by her side said:

"A gentleman wishes to be introduced to you, Mademoiselle Dolores."

With a start she turned to confront the author and Dick Trevelyan. For one instant they were both speechless, then, recovering herself by an effort, Dolores said hastily:

"Pardon my leaving you abruptly; later in the evening I shall have great pleasure in making the acquaintance of—Captain Trevelyan? Yes, *au revoir*."

She disappeared on to the stage, and Dick Trevelyan started, as if shot, at the noisy clapping that greeted the favourite of the public, and followed her till the author caught hold of him and inquired, with a laugh, if he wanted to join in the ballet.

"Come to the front, Trevelyan; the dance is well worth seeing, I can assure you," he added. "It's caught on, but then it's inspiring to have such a girl to carry out one's ideas."

Manlike, he did not say for how much of the idea he was indebted to the girl, but once in front he merely explained that the scene was called the Thistle Down dance, and gave himself

up for at least the fiftieth time to rapt admiration of the dance and his own accompanying music.

It was in truth tuneful and pretty, well fitted to the meadow with its soft plummy grass, and broad rippling brook reflecting sunset lights, which was the background, and in front Dolores, marvellously costumed to represent thistle down, skimmed, swayed and moved almost as lightly as the real thing under the boughs of great trees.

Tiny elves peeped out of the branches or from under tall foxgloves and ferns, each armed with a great flower trumpet, through which they began to blow at the Thistle Down fairy; merrily she swayed this way and that as they blew from various points of vantage, or chased her about the stage; finally, as they united in one vigorous effort, she rose from the ground at first but a foot or two, but gradually went higher and higher, apparently blown away by the mischievous elves right across the meadow grass till she floated over the river and was lost to view.

It was a triumph of stage mechanism, but very few artistes could have availed themselves of its aid with such fearless grace as Dolores; and it was no wonder that thunders of applause nightly recognized this fact.

Dick gazed as in a trance. He had believed his love for Lilian Pomeroy dead—was, in fact, engaged to the American heiress; and behold it had revived fiercely, madly, rendering him heedless of all else. Dolores the dancer might be the vile, lost woman people declared her, to him she was the girl whose soft lips he had kissed in the old Devonshire garden, and whose yielding form had been clasped to his heart. She was his Lilian, his first and only real love.

Would this terrible play never end? The music rang in his ears, the lights dazzled him, the whole thing was without meaning and chaotic.

"Ah, again!" and he leant forward with hungry, eager eyes fixed on one figure, as again Dolores appeared to go through the part, luckily so familiar to her that she could not make any error.

At last, heaven be praised! at last the accursed thing was over, and Dick, half mad with the restraint he had put on himself, hurried to the back to await the public favourite.

She came after a brief delay, cloaked and ready to go home-

She had schooled herself well, and by no tremor of word or glance betrayed what Dick was to her.

Her cold, gracious reserve braced him also, and taking his cue from her, he spoke as any stranger might in admiration of her dancing, and when, declining invitations to supper parties, she accepted his escort to the little brougham which always fetched her, she did not alter her manner, though with a pressure that was almost cruel he caught her hand and whispered :

“For God’s sake tell me when I can see you alone to-morrow.”

In the same quiet, repressed voice she replied, naming an early hour at her rooms, and only as the brougham drove off gave way to blinding tears and sobs which shook her from head to foot.

Dick did not keep her waiting next day, and at the sight of the simply-dressed girl, with a loose soft knot of hair, he lost the haunting vision of the dancer, with every charm made the most of to attract the eyes of men.

“Lilian, my darling, have I found you at last?” he cried. “My own love, nothing shall part us again.”

“You forget,” she answered gravely, “your father forbade our marriage, and you, Dick—you did not even send a few lines to say good-bye in answer to mine.”

“I got but one letter,” said Dick, “and in that you forbade my writing.”

“Your father dictated it, but I wrote after to you,” she replied.

“I never had that letter,” he said eagerly. “Lilian, darling, what a brute you must have thought me; but we were in the hills, fighting, and—oh, never mind now—say you will marry me at once, darling.”

“Your father rejected Lilian Pomeroy for no fault but poverty; to Dolores, the dancer, he might well object. You must know what is said of me.”

“But it is not true!” cried Dick hastily; “no one could look in your sweet eyes and believe a word against you.”

“It is not true, but who would believe me now?” said the girl sadly.

With a passionate exclamation Dick caught her in his arms, raining kisses on her lips, her eyes, her hair.

“Come with me, my own,” he said; “marry me at once. I will send in my papers and we will go abroad. I know of one of

ours doing right well in Texas; you would not fear that life with me, would you?"

For a few moments Lilian gave herself up to his caresses unresistingly, clasping her arms about his neck, then suddenly drew back.

"Dick," she murmured, "don't tempt me; I can't, I can't—my mother is blind, and perhaps dying; it is impossible."

Turning to a table, she took a letter from Dr. Meadows and gave it to him. In plain words the urgency of the case was stated, and the expense of the operation, which the doctor had ascertained for her accurately.

The sum was a large one—Dick's face fell. He had not a quarter of it at his bank.

"My God, the curse that poverty is!" he cried bitterly, throwing down the letter. "Lilian, is there no other way? must you be sacrificed? Cannot Mrs. Pomeroy go elsewhere as well as to this place, and how can you raise this money?"

"There are ways, and it can be done," returned Lilian firmly, with a strange light in her resolute eyes. "But I cannot marry you, Dick."

Then he lost his head, and implored her, and accused her of coldness, and while he raved at and prayed to her by turns, her own heart was pleading for him more earnestly than he could speak for himself, and it was all she could do not to throw herself in his arms and tell him how dear he was to her.

But between her and happiness rose the vision of the dying father's mute appeal, and her own voluntarily assumed charge and her oath.

"At any cost to myself," she thought, "I will give myself, my soul and body, for her, since there is no pity in earth or heaven."

Half-an-hour later Dick was striding from her door as if pursued by demons, and Dolores lay in a dead faint on the floor of her room, while out in the street a barrel organ slowly ground out the air of:

"Heaven's gates are closed to me,
Since my love ceased to woo."

And the afternoon post carried the briefest of notes to Lord Porthleven, merely, "Come back to me.—DOLORES." He lost no time in obeying its summons, and in place of the resolute, defiant

girl he had left, found a trembling, white-faced creature, with eyes that looked as if sleep were a stranger to them, and quivering, piteous lips.

“What have you done to yourself, child? And why have you sent for me?” he said kindly.

“I wish to tell you that if you still care for me . . .” She paused and looked up at him, and drawing her gently to him, Lord Porthleven said :

“I will never give you cause to repent your trust in me,” and kissed her forehead gravely.

Then, as if to reassure her, he put her in a chair, and taking another at the other side of the table, asked news of her mother, sketched out the plan necessary for Mrs. Pomeroy's removal, dictated a letter to Dr. Meadows, authorizing him to take all steps and accompany the invalid if desirable, and quietly forced bank notes on the girl to inclose in her letter, silencing all remonstrance, and bidding her use any reserve fund she had for herself.

He then, assuming without question that Mrs. Pomeroy knew nothing of her daughter's profession, discussed the very remote chance of Jael making any discoveries, and was altogether so kind and matter-of-fact, that the misery and shame that Lillian had felt seemed to vanish in his presence, for though Lord Porthleven might be worthless morally, he had infinite tact, and was bent on winning the girl's heart as well as herself. He even refrained from any allusion to the relations that would be henceforth established between himself and her, merely taking the right to settle everything for her.

The piece she was in would only run a very short time longer, and she begged to finish her engagement. “Old Crusty,” the manager, had shown her kindness, and her withdrawal, even under heavy forfeit, would be a loss to him.

Lord Porthleven assented for her own sake and partly for his own. He was absolutely indifferent as a rule to public opinion, and made no secret of the fact that at different times fair, frail actresses had been indebted to him for their smart villas and showy equipages, unlimited indulgence in every form of extravagance and similar delights; but those affairs seemed to him different, mere common, vulgar *liaisons* with disreputable women. To Dolores he had at first been attracted by her beauty, but as

he came to know her better she inspired him with sincere admiration of her character ; he saw her brave and self-reliant, pure amid temptations, quiet and ladylike in her home, and capable of true deep love by her devotion to her blind mother ; and cursing the fate that bound him to a relentless woman, he determined, if she would but trust him, to devote his remaining years to her, as if she were the wife he could not make her. He desired to keep the matter a secret now that fate had forced her to yield. Once away from England he cared not what was said of them both ; but Dolores should be shielded while yet within reach of malicious cruel tongues.

Mrs. Pomeroy was brought safely to London, and the surgeon's verdict proved satisfactory : he considered her case curable. Explanation as to the manner in which her expenses were defrayed could no longer be withheld from her, for though unworldly, she was not wanting in clear common sense, and knew that it was not likely that a young girl could be earning money enough to pay for an invalid carriage and apartments, which were perfect in every detail, besides the attendance of a specialist and other expensive items.

Lord Porthleven had foreseen this, and was quite prepared ; he bade Dolores leave all to him, and she obeyed him passively, in the gentle indifferent fashion which had grown on her of late.

Together they went to visit Mrs. Pomeroy, and Lord Porthleven bade her feel her daughter's left hand, on which was a wedding ring ; then, while in tearful anxiety the blind mother implored to be told all, he assured her that they had only been anxious to spare her all agitation, such as a mother must feel in giving her only child to a stranger, but that her new son now implored her forgiveness, and trusted that she would learn to regard him as wholly devoted to the daughter who was so precious to her.

Few men had a more admirable choice of words or more pleasing voice, and once the shock of the revelation was over Mrs. Pomeroy was charmed with the "son-in-law," who had showed such kindness of heart and liberality.

Lord Porthleven had privately regarded the fact of Mrs. Pomeroy's existence as a bore, but her sweetness and refinement reminded him of his own dead mother, and he found himself decidedly attracted and pleased with the fragile, helpless woman,

who believed so implicitly in the lie that was more sacred than truth, and thanked him with such warmth for all he had done for her.

To use his title would have been incurring risk of detection. Lilian had been taught to call him by his Christian name of Maurice, and to Mrs. Pomeroy he gave his family name of Eaton, which was sufficiently common to attract no attention if she spoke to any one of her "married" daughter.

So far nothing could be more satisfactory, and Lord Porthleven felt as if he had recovered the halcyon days of his lost youth. He longed like a boy for the hour when he could bid the sailors raise the yacht's anchor, and let the good boat bear them away from London, with its worries, anxieties and spiteful tongues, to the lovely far-off islands of the South Pacific, where amid Arcadian scenes he fancied himself living in a kind of idyll with the girl who had grown so dear to him. Nor did the idea of Mrs. Pomeroy's presence annoy him; the gentle blind lady was not likely to be a jarring note in the harmony, and her servant, a fisherman's daughter, would be a capital attendant for Lilian, as well as her mother; he wanted no sharp, ordinary lady's-maid about her, to pry into secrets.

The time passed rapidly, Mrs. Pomeroy had borne the operation better even than was anticipated, and Lilian, feeling her sacrifice repaid, endeavoured to prove her gratitude to Lord Porthleven; and he, delighted by her altered manner, which he hoped indicated a warmer feeling, came one day with a quantity of jewel cases.

"I have brought my family diamonds for you to see, child," he said. "I think some of them would suit you; others must be re-set."

There was a flash as of the sun on water as he opened the cases and the great stones shone and sparkled.

For a moment the girl gazed on them in mute delight, it was not in the heart of woman to be indifferent to such splendid diamonds. Then suddenly remembering what she was to him, she flushed crimson to the brow, and turned away to hide her face.

"I could not," she said sobbing, "I could not wear them; I have no right."

In a moment his arm was round her and her head pillowed on

his shoulder tenderly ; with fond words he tried to console her and then, as the sobs grew less violent, to persuade her that he had full power to give her the jewels during his life.

Lilian did not disengage herself from the sheltering arm, but at length said firmly :

“ Maurice, I want to tell you, once for all, that not one of your thousand acts of kindness to me is unnoticed. With all my heart and soul I thank you for them, and some day, when we are a long, long way off, I may forget—a little—what I am—and repay you much better than I can now ; but these would shame me every time I looked at them. I should feel I was just a common creature who had sold herself for diamonds and show, and I would never have done that.”

And she broke down again, but in her grief for the first time clung to him as if she realized a little all he felt for her, and that he was her only hope and protection ; and when at last she recovered composure Lord Porthleven closed the cases and said, smiling :

“ My pet, you shall have your own way in everything, but I may at least give you a few trinkets if you do not care for these.”

“ I do not care much for jewellery at all, I think,” replied Lilian. “ You see Dolores the dancer’s Parisian company stones have put me out of conceit of them.”

“ I wonder what would really please you as a present ?” said Lord Porthleven. “ You have such simple tastes, child.”

“ I will tell you, Maurice,” she replied, with her eyes brightening and a smile dimpling her cheeks. “ The lease of a little millinery shop.”

“ What on earth do you want with that ? Has the fashionable craze of turning shopkeeper bitten you, too ? I’m afraid, madam, it won’t pay while you are in the Antipodes yachting,” he said jokingly.

“ I’m afraid it wouldn’t,” replied Lilian ; “ but I’ll explain, if you get into that chair.”

And, taking a low seat at Lord Porthleven’s feet, Lilian proceeded to tell him of her humble friends, Kit and Betty ; and how Kit would marry her Bill if they could afford it ; and Betty and she could do a thriving trade, if only they had rooms and a shop, Betty being so clever.

And if Lord Porthleven cared little enough for philanthropy, he was delighted with anything that brightened his darling's eyes and brought a smile to her lips.

So he gave Lilian *carte blanche* to settle the girls who had befriended her in her need, telling her that nothing was too much to ask of him. And she went off gaily, forgetting all her troubles in the pleasure of making others happy.

Kit's ecstasies were even enough to satisfy her benefactress, and Bill, who chanced to be there, though rather tongue-tied, was clearly most grateful and pleased. But Betty, instead of showing joy, stamped passionately, and cried out angrily :

"I be surprised at yer, Kit hand Bill, that I be! Carn't yer see it's just gettin' rid hof hus, she is. I don't want yer money and yer fust-class little shops, Miss Dolores ; take hit away."

And then breaking into a storm of noisy tears and cries, she grovelled at Lilian's feet, kissing her dress.

"Oh, don't, don't go, my hown darlin'," she cried. "I wants nothin' but to see yer face and 'ear yer voice, my dear, beautiful princess. You've bore hall my beastly tempers, and been just as sweet to me has if I wasn't crooked hand hugly and 'orrid. I'll die hif yer goes, that I will."

Lilian did her best to console the poor girl, who, in spite of her deformed person and cankered temper, could love so devotedly the friend who had been a sunbeam in her darkened life.

Shirking the question of departure, she bade Bill get a cab, and took the sisters to the shop they had long coveted, though never dreamt could be theirs, and even got Betty to take interest in the details which concerned her work, and lulled her suspicions by talking of future dresses to be designed for herself ; finally letting them be happy in giving her a tea which embodied their ideas of luxury, and then drove on to see her mother and hear her weak voice cheerfully talking of the goodness of "Mr. Eaton," and the blessing it was to her that her darling was so fortunate as to be his wife, and would be shielded from all trouble and anxiety by his love, as long as they were spared to each other.

Had Lilian Pomeroy fallen into the hands of a different man she would have gone through a very hell of remorse, but so far

she was tenderly guarded from all outer influence calculated to wound her sensitive nature.

She was so young still and so impressionable that she had begun insensibly to believe that Lord Porthleven was right in maintaining that, under the circumstances, the tie between them was a true and pure marriage in the sight of heaven.

Perhaps, too, the months spent as the favourite of the public had slightly deadened her sense of right and wrong, but at any rate to her own surprise she began to feel that her future need not be a blank, a mere weary existence given up to passive endurance, but that fresh interests and happiness would be quite possible.

Her passionate love for her mother and deep gratitude to Lord Porthleven were strong moving springs, but apart from these there was the girlish love of travel and adventure, and the natural longing for change and an easy life, inherent in most minds.

Lord Porthleven himself could hardly be more anxious to start for fresh scenes than Lilian was growing.

The "Gitana," a fine steamer-yacht of some 500 tons, was being fitted out regardless of cost for a long ocean cruise, and Lilian had been down once to see her and suggest any further improvements if possible; but the dainty freshness of the pretty state-rooms, and perfect though costly simplicity of the saloons and deck house, left nothing to be desired, and the novelty of it all charmed its future mistress, who became interested and delighted to an unwonted degree.

The "Gitana" had been quietly put in commission at a small unfrequented place to avoid exciting curiosity, and when ready would pick up her owner and his party at Harwich, starting as soon as they were on board.

Mrs. Pomeroy had regained strength so rapidly that she felt quite equal to the move, and was most anxious not to delay her "son-in-law," or become a drag on him.

The last day dawned, and Lilian, after a morning visit to her mother, was busily engaged in her rooms sorting her possessions and destroying many relics of the past.

Dick's letters had been burnt before she gave herself to Lord Porthleven, but one little keepsake remained. As a schoolboy he had bought for her birthday a locket, set with

a tiny turquoise forget-me-not ; a trinket of very small value, but it called up a thousand memories, and her tears fell fast over it.

A knock at the door startled her ; drying her eyes hastily she opened it, and the small servant of the house announced, " There's a gentleman, mum. I put him in the other room, mum ; I dun know who he be."

Lilian was expecting some costumes from Redfern, and concluding it was probable that the " gentleman " was come to fit them on, did not hurry herself much.

When she entered the sitting-room, which was littered with very obvious traces of packing, the visitor was pacing up and down impatiently, and with a feeling akin to dismay she saw as he faced her that it was Dick Trevelyan himself, looking excited and eager.

Without waiting for any commonplace greeting he sprang forward, and seizing her hand, cried triumphantly :

" My darling, at last I can claim you ! I am independent—have money of my own—nothing can come between us—an old uncle died last week, and I have come into two thousand a year and a nice little house in Kent."

Then, as his eyes met hers, he stopped suddenly, startled by the look of despair and horror in her pale face.

" Lilian, what is it ? Surely, my heart's darling, you are as thankful as I am that this money came to me in time to let me make you my wife."

With an effort she answered, after two or three vain attempts :

" Too late, too late, Dick !"

" Oh," he cried, " I know ; you have seen my engagement in the society papers. Well, it's true, darling ; I drifted into it. She's American, you know—pretty, smart, rich ; she—I oughtn't to say so, but it's a fact—it's mostly her doing. I didn't care what became of me. She will take another—lots of fellows are after her."

" I never heard of her before," said Lilian. " It's not that, Dick ; but oh, go back to her ! Don't ask me anything—forget me—I can never, never marry you."

Dick fixed his eyes sternly on her.

" Lilian, what is this mystery ? I will know. Have you ceased to love me ?"

She could not answer in the affirmative. She could deceive her blind mother, but her face would have betrayed her had she tried to lie to the strong, masterful, but passionately fond lover, who had been all in all to her, and yet was the one man in the world that held her heart.

With drooping head she stood silent ; there was a pause, then Dick said :

“Lilian, answer me, darling. Are you married ?”

Still she kept silent, and glancing round, he noticed for the first time the evident signs of packing.

“You are leaving,” he cried hastily. “With whom are you going ?”

“With my mother,” was the reply.

“Where to ?” he questioned sharply.

“Abroad to recruit her health,” said Lilian in low tones.

“What has this to do with our marriage, Lilian ? You know I would follow you anywhere, and marry you when and where you please. My dearest, do not torture me ; tell me all.”

Lower and lower the fair head drooped ; the crimson blushes of shame rose, then receded, and a few words came in gasps from her stiffly-set white lips.

Dick staggered back as if shot when their import dawned on him, then seeing Lilian turn as if to leave him, with a low quivering moan as of some dying creature, he caught her once more in his arms, protesting passionately that by all he held sacred he cared nothing for what she had confessed, and entreating her to marry him and free herself from her present position, and he would adore her till his dying day.

But with sudden strength she pushed him from her, crying wildly :

“Go, Dick, go ! Oh, for God’s sake don’t make it harder ! I tell you once for all, there is no turning back for me now. My mother believes me married ; the truth would kill her.”

“Who is the man ?” exclaimed Dick suddenly. “I will kill him as sure as there is a God above us. Stay ; I know, Lilian ; it is Lord Porthleven.”

“You have no right to ask, and I will not answer,” returned Lilian firmly.

“You cannot deny it,” said Dick. “He is a blackguard—a

—oh, it's no good abusing him. My darling, why should you sacrifice yourself?"

"My oath!" Lilian cried, "my oath to my dying father. I swore to him that I would shield my mother from pain at any cost. I have kept it, even if I have lost my soul. God help me, my life has been too hard for me."

With a sudden movement she eluded her lover's grasp and was gone.

Dick, left alone, paced about; threw himself into a chair, thinking hard; finally rang the bell and asked to see Mademoiselle Dolores for a moment.

The small domestic, with a grin, informed him she had sent for a hansom and gone out.

"To avoid me," muttered Dick, cursing the ingenuity of woman, and leaving the house in a savage mood, he determined not to be baffled, but to snatch Lilian from her possessor at any risk to her mother or his own prospects.

The softness of love was for the moment extinguished, and the brute fierceness latent in most men had the upper hand. Revenge on his powerful rival was moving Dick's soul more than passion for the frail girl he loved so dearly in cooler moments.

As he strode on a dense fog swooped rapidly down on the street; it had threatened all day, and now grew thicker. Suddenly, as Dick passed the door of a club, he saw Lord Porthleven ahead of him, the light of a lamp just catching his profile sufficiently to allow Dick to recognize him.

With a mad desire for vengeance Dick hastened after him, grasping the heavy stick he carried with a murderous impulse.

He would have caught up Lord Porthleven immediately, but from a side street a lot of half-scared children ran out suddenly, with a crying baby in a rickety perambulator; and this miserable conveyance was dashed by its small driver right against Dick's legs, almost throwing him down, and upsetting the luckless baby into the street. Out of the fog stepped a policeman; the wretched screaming infant was saved from the wheels of a cab, and Dick hurried on; but the short detention had given Lord Porthleven a start, and in the darkness he could no longer be distinguished, having, in fact, turned off to take a short cut.

Baffled and raging, Dick next tried to buy a stall ticket for the last performance at the Frivolity, but could not even get the worst place in the cheapest part of the theatre, much less a stall. Never mind, he would go to the pit ; but at his club he found a note from his *fiancée*, saying they had, by a chance, got a box, and he must join them at the Frivolity if he could not come to dinner. He could not command himself enough to go through a conventional meal with his betrothed, but he would go to the box later.

Miss Melcy Fulsom, exquisitely attired in the latest creation of a Parisian dressmaker, received him graciously enough when he joined her, and assured him that she had "Never seen anything so purely elegant as that sweet creature Dolores, and wondered any man could see her and keep his heart sound."

Luckily, she was rather engrossed with the stage, and her *chaperone* was placid and sleepy, so Dick could remain at the back of the box and gaze at the one being who might have been alone on the boards for all he saw of her companions.

Presently more men joined them, and began to flirt vigorously with Miss Fulsom, Dick's presence adding a little piquancy to the amusement.

"See Porthleven below there in the stalls?" drawled one. "He's awfully gone on Dolores, but she won't look at him. Now, Miss Fulsom, try my glasses ; this is the Thistle Down dance, w'eally the pwettiest thing of the play, don't you know."

The dainty rippling music began, and every eye was fixed on the lovely dancer ; her graceful movements became yet more and more rapid. She was surpassing herself, and as the tiny fairies chased her, blowing vigorously with all their might, the American heiress, growing yet more enthusiastic, slipped a jewelled bangle from her arm, clasped it round her costly bouquet, and threw the flowers with so true an aim that they fell uninjured at the feet of Dolores, who, looking up to smile her thanks, met Dick's eyes, and with quick intuition divined from whom she had received the gift, and, womanlike, noted accurately the smallest details of dress and appearance of the girl to whom her lover had plighted his faith, while his heart was given to his first love. But the public, gazing with eager eyes at the graceful scene, only saw that their favourite and her little elves were excelling themselves on this last night.

Dolores rose slowly from the ground, still swaying in tune to the bright music, and waving a laughing adieu to the tiny sprites who still blew vigorously through their flower trumpets.

Suddenly, as the theatre echoed with the thunder of clapping and shouts of irrepressible admirers, there was a sharp crack, a heavy fall, and a white figure lay motionless on the stage, face down, with arms outstretched, and the scared children, screaming loudly, flew in all directions wildly.

Lord Porthleven sprang across the footlights, but, though he lost not a second, a workman was already raising the drooping head with tender touch, and sobbing like a child as he exclaimed :

"I told 'em I knowed it ; I said it warn't safe. Oh, miss, miss, do hopen your eyes ! Kit and Bet 'll break their 'earts. If only they'd let me put fresh fixins as I wanted to——"

The curtain fell ; there was a buzz of talk among the audience, and Melcy Fulsom, with a kindly impulse, sprang up and said :

"If no other woman here's going to that poor soul, I am. I'm just a daisy hand at helping ; we'd plenty of accidents down west. Come on, Dick."

Then, as she looked in his face, like a flash his soul was laid bare to her and his secret known.

With a grasp of his hand that a man might have given a friend at his need, she whispered :

"Dick, I see. Never mind me. You know I'm not mean. Just take no more notice of me than if I was a real nurse, and waste no time, but come."

Miss Fulsom had not overrated her capabilities. With some difficulty they gained admission to the room, where Dolores lay on a hastily improvised couch of gaily coloured cushions and other stage properties. Two or three other actresses were there, kind-hearted and willing, but nervous and of little use.

The cool, practical, deft-handed American came just in time to be invaluable to the two surgeons, who finished their examination and stood aside consulting with grave looks. In a corner honest Bill the carpenter gave occasional vent to his feelings in a smothered sob or sniff.

Dick Trevelyan was restless and utterly overcome. Lord Porthleven remained silent and was absolutely still. Melcy

quietly and in a business-like way administered stimulants in minute quantities, watching closely for the faintest sign of consciousness, and presently moved quietly from her patient's side, laid her hand on Lord Porthleven's arm and whispered :

"Her eyes must open on a friend's face, and you are the only one here that can take a grip of his feelings."

Miss Fulsom had observed symptoms of returning animation, and as Dolores slowly opened her dark eyes Lord Porthleven, bending over her, asked her gently with untrembling voice if she felt better.

She answered rather vaguely, and the surgeons, returning to her, with Melcy Fulsom's aid, gave stronger stimulants, and as they took effect life returned more fully and Dolores was able to reply clearly to their few brief questions. Then the men of science had another short conference aside, and stood hesitating as if uncertain to whom their verdict should be given.

Lord Porthleven seeing this joined them, and quietly assuming all responsibility, asked their opinion.

The elder of the two replied decisively: "The poor girl may live an hour, but the case is hopeless; her spine is broken and there are other fatal injuries." He was a man of note, and had given so many similar pieces of intelligence that he was impassive and business-like. His companion, younger and more impressionable by nature, added: "We trust there will be no suffering. Do you know if she has friends or relatives who should be fetched?"

"None," replied Lord Porthleven curtly. "I will remain—to the end."

The junior surgeon thought his cold quiet manner heartless, and set him down mentally as an indifferent stranger; his senior, who had keener perceptions and much experience, saw that it concealed a mortal wound and pitied Lord Porthleven, but merely said kindly:

"Shall I break it to her? In my opinion it is false kindness to leave her in ignorance."

* * * * *

In Lilian Pomeroy's sweet eyes there was no sign of fear as she learnt her doom.

To Melcy Fulsom she turned, saying in pleading tones:

"I know who you are ; it is good of you to come to me. Am I too bad for you to kiss me just once ?"

"Too bad, my poor dear !" cried the impulsive American ; "I'd give half my fortune to save your life for Dick," and she pressed her fresh red lips warmly to the soft mouth that must so soon be silent for ever, her tears falling fast as she did so.

Lilian's face lit up with a strange radiance as she whispered :

"God bless you. I thought all good women would shrink from me. You will forgive Dick for caring for me, won't you ? We were boy and girl together."

Melcy Fulsom, more moved than ever before in her careless life, could not speak, but putting Dick Trevelyan's hand in the dying girl's, turned away hastily, not to disturb that bitter parting.

What passionate words of agony and regret were murmured no one knew, but in a few moments Lilian, gathering her fast-ebbing strength put him gently from her, saying firmly :

"Good-bye, Dick ; go now, please."

In answer to her appealing eyes Melcy kissed her tenderly once more, and slipping her arm through Dick's, led him from the room unhesitatingly, he being far too stunned and heart-broken to resist her firmness, and in his misery depending visibly on her for comfort.

Lilian gazed after them with a smile on her lips, though tears were on her long lashes.

"He will be happy in time," she thought, with a sharp thrill of pain as she realized how soon even the best beloved are forgotten ; then as her eyes fell on Lord Porthleven, something told her that in one heart would her memory be cherished, and stretching out her hand to him she said softly :

"Maurice, I only want *you* now—please stay with me ; I shall not keep you long."

And as he knelt by her alone she said :

"I think you loved me best of all."

Few words passed between them. Lord Porthleven took on himself the care of the blind mother, to whom the daughter's life had been a voluntary sacrifice.

There were long intervals when Lilian relapsed into semi-unconsciousness, murmuring over and over, "Prayer from my lips is vain." Suddenly her eyes lit up with the strange far-seeing

glance only seen just before death: "Father," she exclaimed, "father, I am coming; I have kept my oath." Then, as if in recognition of the man who bent over her, longing unspeakably for one last word, she murmured vaguely, "I can't stay now; it's my call; my last call. *Au revoir*, Maurice."

And as Lord Porthleven tenderly closed the dark-fringed eyes and pressed his last kiss on the sweet dead face, he said aloud: "God grant it may be *au revoir*, my darling."

THE END.

Time's Traces.

By MRS. WILL C. HAWKSLEY.

DOST thou hear them, the loud tramping footsteps of Time ?
Wheeling, whirling, mocking memories,
Circling, surging, blunting purposes.
Yet onward, ever onward,
Sweeping present into past ;
Still forward, ever forward,
Hasting towards a future vast.

Dost thou see them, the deep-dented footprints of Time ?
Treading, kneading, bruising youthfulness,
Stamping, scarring, marring loveliness.
Not pausing, never pausing,
To repair the havoc wrought ;
Nor stopping, ever stopping,
To enforce the lesson taught.

Dost thou feel them, the relentless footmarks of Time ?
Smirching, soiling, spoiling enjoyment,
Numbing, dulling, quenching excitement.
And stifling, ever stifling,
Passion's ardour, love's sweet pain,
Whilst raking, ever raking,
All the fire from nerve and brain.

Dost thou fear it, the resistless footfall of Time ?
Crushing, rushing, toiling upward,
Pressing, pushing, struggling Homeward.
So tending, ever tending,
From darkness to the light ;
Thus freeing, ever freeing,
Earth-bound man from nature's blight.

A Modern Eve.

By LILIAN HOLT.

"YOU have come just in time, Helen ; I was sure I could rely on you," and Leslie Glyndon looked up at his sister, who had arrived in answer to an urgent telegram, telling her of his terrible accident. "Yes," he went on, "it is a general smash up ; I know that there is no hope." He paused, then added, "My poor little Stewart ; you will care for her, Helen ? she is my all."

Mrs. Fenton nodded an assent, she could not speak ; it seemed so pitiful to see her brother, who had always been the personification of health and strength, now lying a helpless wreck. A spasm of agony crossed his face, he gasped for breath, then made a sign to her to bend down.

"Remember," he panted, the effort to speak causing beads of perspiration to stand on his forehead : "Not one word on *that* subject before she is twenty-five. When she is engaged to be married, give her the packet you will find sealed and directed to her in my private desk. If it should happen that she is not engaged before that age, you may destroy it ; there is no reason she should know . . . my poor child ! Helen, you promise me this ?"

Mrs. Fenton laid her hand on his. "I will do all that you wish, Leslie ; you can trust me."

He closed his eyes with a sigh of relief. "Call Stewart," he murmured.

She came swiftly to his side and sank on her knees by the sofa where he had been first placed.

"Father" she said pleadingly, "tell me, it is not true."

He understood only too well her meaning ; it was so difficult to meet the anxious questioning look full of a terrified eagerness. He gazed at the sweet face so near his own, then whispered tenderly :

"My darling, my poor little Stewart."

It was enough, she knew now ; her head sank lower and lower till it rested on the couch. She spoke no word, she uttered no sound, her grief was too intense. Once Mr. Glyndon tried to stretch out his hand towards her, but the movement caused him such exquisite pain, he was forced to desist.

"Stewart," he whispered ; she looked up, pale, but tearless—"where is your aunt?"

Mrs. Fenton came forward ; she had been standing near the window.

"The pain is getting worse," he said ; "she must not be here. Stewart, my poor little girl, kiss me."

She rose slowly to her feet, very still, very cold ; for one moment she gave way, and sinking back into her former position, covered his hands with passionate kisses ; the next, with a shuddering sigh, she bent over him and laid her cheek to his in a lingering embrace, then suffered her aunt to lead her from the room.

A few short hours and all was over. Only the lifeless form remained of the bright handsome father whom she had loved so well ! only a memory of his unflinching tenderness, and a grief which took many a long day to soften.

* * * * *

There was a happy smile on Stewart Glyndon's face as she stood on the broad terrace in front of Chilton Manor and looked out across the vast expanse before her.

The house was built on a hill, and the garden sloped down for some distance, terminating in a small grove of pine trees, beyond which lay the sea, in all the quiescent beauty of a summer evening. To the right, and round the other side of the house, were more pine trees, rearing their stately heads in uncompromising severity to the sky above them. On the left, a breezy common stretched away, clad in gorgeous robes of purple heather and golden gorse, while far in the distance a small chain of hills might be faintly discerned.

The house itself was a modern one, replete with every comfort and every convenience. Its chief feature was the large square hall in the centre, often used as a sitting-room, and round which ran a quaint oak gallery, reached by a flight of broad, shallow

stairs. Several doors in this gallery led to various parts of the house.

There were many large and lofty rooms, too many, thought Mrs. Fenton, Stewart's widowed aunt, who had lived with and brought up her niece for the last eight years, ever since that sad day when her brother, Stewart's father, had been thrown from his horse and brought home unconscious. He rallied for a few hours, and Stewart never forgot her agony of sorrow when she realized she was alone in the world. Her mother she had never known, but between herself and her father had existed one of those intense affections sometimes met with between a man of the world and a child.

Mr. Glyndon had been a wealthy man, and at his death everything passed to his only child, so that Stewart was trebly devoted to Chilton Manor and its surroundings, in that it had been the chosen home of her father, her birthplace, and belonged to her entirely.

Under the firm, yet tender rule of her aunt, to whom she was devoted, Stewart had passed a very quiet and happy girlhood; and when, at nineteen, it had been thought advisable to take her to London for the season, her father's youngest sister, Lady Kemendyne, gladly undertook the chaperonage of her beautiful niece.

Stewart had enjoyed the whirl of gaiety while it lasted, though she came back unspoiled to declare that, after all, there was "no place like home."

That she was beautiful no one could deny. Tall and slight, she held herself as erect as one of her favourite pine trees. Her wavy hair shone in the sunlight like threads of gold, and her large grey eyes with their long lashes had not lost the trustful, innocent expression of childhood. Her features were somewhat irregular, but her chief charm lay in the expressiveness of her face, at times so bright and intelligent and full of vivacity, at others, so grave and reflective, with a depth of thought far beyond her years. Stewart's life had been a wonderfully shielded one, and her father had acted wisely when he left her to the care of his widowed and childless sister.

Mrs. Fenton was one of those women who rule without seeming to do so, and who imperceptibly draw out the best points of those with whom they come in contact. She had remained at

the manor during Stewart's absence, and the time had seemed long, though she would not for one moment have breathed a word which might lead to the curtailment of her niece's pleasure. Nevertheless she gladly welcomed her back, and realized how dreary the house had seemed without her bright and happy presence.

Stewart certainly thought the season had been a success. She had enjoyed everything to the full, it was all so new to her; nor had she been disillusioned. But Lady Kemendyne did not altogether consider the result as satisfactory as it might have been; there was an under-current of disappointment in her letter to Mrs. Fenton concerning Stewart's engagement to Basil Lamont, Lord Artington's younger son.

"With her face and fortune," she wrote, "she might have married *any one*, and she has only herself to blame that she is not the future Countess of Invery. However, I have done my best, and I must say that Mr. Lamont is a very rising young man. He is in the diplomatic service, and a great favourite with every one; still, she might have done better; but young people in these days are so determined to go their own way."

Stewart certainly did not think she could possibly have bettered herself in any way; she was perfectly satisfied, and full of the happiness that life held out to her. She had yielded herself and her love to one whom she felt was the ruler of her fate, and she was more than content with her choice.

And so on this August evening she stood looking seawards, and felt that life was a very good thing, even though it seemed the fashion to consider that it was not worth living. Her happy nature could not understand the luxury of imaginary woes, and her character was a curious combination of romance and common sense, often very disconcerting to her friends.

The day had been oppressively hot, but at sunset a soft refreshing breeze had sprung up, and out on the terrace, Stewart, lost in thought, seemed oblivious to the beauty of her surroundings. So absorbed was she that she failed to notice her aunt's approach.

"Dreaming, Stewart?"

The girl started, then smiled, and slipping her arm through Mrs. Fenton's, said:

"Let us go down to the edge of the cliffs; it will be cooler there, I think, and I want to talk to you."

They strolled slowly across the garden, and through the grove of pine trees until they reached the spot known as "The View," a rustic bench fixed between two tall pines not far from the edge and situated on a high point of land which jutted out into the water; below them lay the sea, its surface just lightly ruffled by the evening breeze.

They sat there in silence. After all, it did not seem as if Stewart were very anxious to begin her conversation. She leaned against the trunk of the tree; her hands, loosely clasped, lay in her lap, and her eyes, full of a quiet happiness, were fixed upon the distant horizon. Every now and then Mrs. Fenton looked at her somewhat wistfully; she was unwilling to disturb her, yet she too had something of which she must speak, and she felt there should be no delay.

At last Stewart turned towards her.

"How grave you look, Aunt Helen. I have been wondering if you will like Basil;" she blushed and smiled as she spoke, then continued:

"He writes that he is coming down here the day after to-morrow, and is most anxious to know you; he has often heard of your perfections from me, and he says he wants to verify them for himself," and she slid her hand affectionately into her aunt's.

"The day after to-morrow," exclaimed Mrs. Fenton. "Oh, not so soon!"

"Too soon, Aunt Helen? but I have been at home a fortnight. Of course," she added, feeling a little bit hurt, "if you don't wish him to come——"

"My dear child," interrupted her aunt, "you mistake me. As you know, I am most anxious to make Mr. Lamont's acquaintance; at the same time I ought to have told you——" she hesitated, then said abruptly: "Stewart, did you never wonder, or think it strange that your father left no paper of his wishes for your guidance, no word of any kind for you?"

Stewart looked at her in blank astonishment; how very extraordinary her aunt was this evening, she thought; then she shook her head.

"The idea did occur to me once or twice, but then it was all

so sudden, and nothing of the sort was found among his papers, or I should have had it. But why do you ask?"

"Because I have a packet for you from him."

"And you have kept it all these years! Oh, Aunt Helen, how could you?" She would have said more, but there was a repressive gravity about Mrs. Fenton which chilled her.

"You must not blame me," was the quiet reply; "your father wished it to be given to you only in the event of your being engaged before you were twenty-five."

"And if I had not become engaged?"

"You would not have had the packet."

"Do you know what it is about, Aunt Helen?"

"Yes."

"Why are you so grave? Is it something sad?"

"It will cause you some sorrow, dear; but I feel sure you have sufficient faith in your father's love for you to accept and act upon his wishes. But it is getting late; we had better go in." She rose as she spoke, for she had no wish to prolong the conversation.

Stewart rose too, but lingered behind, thoughtful and perplexed. The light had almost faded, the sea looked grey and sullen, and a thick mist rolling up added to the weirdness of the scene. The gentle splashing sound of the ripples on the sands below struck on her ears, as it had never done before, with a strange monotone of sadness. So are we "at one" with nature, so is nature "at one" with us, in all our moods, whether of joy or sorrow.

She shivered slightly as she turned away, then walked slowly home; but how different were her feelings now to what they had been a short while before, as she traversed the same path; then she had been full of happy thoughts for the future, now a foreboding sense of coming evil weighed on her mind. What could it mean?

Her aunt had reached the house before her, and Stewart, disinclined for further talk, went straight to her own room. A few minutes later there came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Fenton entered, carrying a thick square white packet. Stewart was standing by the window, and her hands shook as she silently took it, and the tears rose when her aunt kissed her lovingly and said:

"You will be brave, dear, I know."

Then she left her, and Stewart sank on her knees by the broad window seat, and gazed long at the superscription, written eight weary years ago.

"In the event of my death, this packet is to be given to my very dear daughter Stewart, should she be engaged to be married before the age of twenty-five; if not engaged when she has attained that age, it is to be burnt unread."

With trembling fingers she broke the seal. Inclosed was a smaller parcel, carefully fastened, even more so than the outer one; wrapped round it was a half sheet of paper, on which were these words:

"MY DARLING—I ask of you but two things; by the love you have for me, do not open the inclosed packet. When you are twenty-five, in the event of your being well and happy, I should wish you to burn it unread. Also, I do not know, when you read this, how near the age you may be, but I implore you not to let your marriage take place before you are twenty-five. You will trust me, dear child, as I trust you, and do not think hardly of your loving—FATHER."

Stewart read and re-read the paper before her, unable to realize fully what it meant.

"Twenty-five, twenty-five," she kept repeating dully; "why is it always twenty-five? But I am only twenty, and Basil . . . why, we were to be married next year . . . and now . . ." she clasped her hands before her—"we must wait five years! I cannot, father," she cried; "do not ask me; it is cruel . . . unkind!" She read the words again, and lingered over the last sentence. Her lips quivered; why must she not open the other packet and know the reason of it all? It seemed so hard, and yet, though she questioned and in her inmost heart rebelled, she never attempted to satisfy her curiosity. She would wait, and if her aunt could not, or would not help her, Basil would soon be with her, and she would be guided by him.

Through the long night she lay with wide-open eyes staring into the darkness, one moment grieving at the apparent tyranny

of the request ; the next, certain that her father's great love only had prompted him to enforce it upon her.

The next morning Stewart laid the half-sheet before her aunt.

Mrs. Fenton looked at the girl's pale face, and her heart ached for her.

"Yes, dear," she said, "I know it seems hard."

"Do you know the contents of the inclosure?" asked Stewart, in a cold, lifeless manner.

"I do," was the reply, "and believe me, if I could do anything to help you in this matter, I would."

"Then you agree with my father in his cruel request?"

"Perfectly—but cruel!—oh, Stewart, if you knew."

"But I do not know, you see," she replied scornfully. "Perhaps if I had been treated more openly it might have been different ; as it is . . ." She stopped ; her pride forbade her to say more, and she hastily left the room.

Mrs. Fenton sighed ; the proud independent nature would suffer immeasurably, and she could do nothing ; she was bound by her promise to her dead brother.

That was a dreary day ; though bright and sunny as its predecessors had been, the hours dragged wearily along. Between Stewart and her aunt there was a barrier, which precluded any renewal of intercourse on the old affectionate terms. Poor Stewart ! she had been so happy, and now this cloud had risen, and the future seemed vague and uncertain. One hope remained to her : surely Basil would think as she did, and in that case . . . it seemed almost like treachery to her dead father even to contemplate the possibility of going against his wishes ; but five years, at her age, was almost a lifetime.

So she counted the hours to Basil's arrival, and the next afternoon drove down in her own little pony-cart to the station, some three miles off, to meet him.

Basil Lamont could not be called really handsome, but he was a striking-looking man. Very tall and broad-shouldered, the natural fairness of his complexion was enhanced by the darkness of his eyes and well-marked eyebrows, and his firmly-shaped mouth was partially hidden by a small moustache. There was a quiet well-bred ease in his manner, which amounted almost to nonchalance, but great force of character and determination lay

hidden under a careless exterior. With Stewart and Basil, so far, the course of true love had run smoothly enough ; they had met at the beginning of the season ; no real obstacles had been placed in their way, though Lady Kemendyne had tried, but ineffectually, to repress the growing intimacy ; and in the end she was obliged to resign herself to circumstances, and admit that, if her niece had not fulfilled her expectations, she really had nothing much to complain of.

And so, as they drove slowly home along the lanes between hedges covered with honeysuckle and "old man's beard," then in flower, they were full of a deep happiness: Basil without a thought of anything but the intense enjoyment of the present moment, Stewart happy too, but subdued by a sorrow that threatened them both. However, she put it aside for the time being, for she had much to hear and to relate.

Afternoon tea was ready and waiting for them under the big tree on the lawn ; there Mrs. Fenton joined them, and for the first time met Basil. That she was prepossessed in his favour Stewart soon saw, and she felt softened. A faint hope rose within her that perhaps, after all, her aunt might in the end change her mind, and explain the meaning of the mystery ; so she exerted herself to be merry and loving as she used to be, and the afternoon passed much more swiftly and happily than she had dared to hope.

It had been her great fear that Basil should discover anything was amiss before she could tell him all, for she knew that, quiet as he was, nothing escaped his observation. And yet, as time went on, was it a kind of foreboding that made her decide to say nothing for the present, but determine to enjoy every hour to the full ? Who can tell ?

The days slipped by, and many a time Stewart longed for, yet almost dreaded, the moment when she should show Basil her father's letter, and ask his advice. At first she had been certain he would feel with her, that such a demand was uncalled for and arbitrary, while the reasons for making it were not divulged. But now she hesitated, and yet blamed herself for so doing. Why should she be afraid ? She would make up her mind and get it over. Basil had been with her a fortnight, and in another three days he was going to Scotland for some shooting. Only that afternoon he had been asking her to fix the beginning of the

year for the wedding, and to his surprise she had turned the subject somewhat abruptly. But this evening—yes, it would be best ; and taking the letter from her desk and putting it in her pocket, she went down the broad staircase just as the gong sounded. Basil was the only occupant of the hall, and he came to meet her with a smile. She put her hand on his arm.

“Basil,” she said softly, “after dinner I want you to come to the View with me ; I have something to tell you.”

He looked at her quickly, her manner and tone struck him as rather unusual.

“Something serious, dear ?” he asked.

“Yes ; I want your help and your advice. I know I can rely on you.”

“I think you can,” he said gravely, and taking her hand in his he slipped it under his arm and held it fast, giving it now and then a reassuring pat, as they followed Mrs. Fenton to the dining-room. The meal was rather a quiet one, and the conversation was kept up chiefly between Mrs. Fenton and Basil ; both noticed that Stewart was unusually depressed, and her aunt looked at her wistfully now and then ; she surmised only too well what was troubling her, for she knew that as yet Stewart had not spoken to Basil.

“What are you going to do this evening ?” she asked, as they rose from the table.

“We are going down to the View for a chat,” was the reply ; “it is quite early, only half-past eight o'clock, and Thompson says there will be a moon to-night. I should like Basil to see how beautiful it is here in the moonlight.”

“Very well, dear ; I have a book I want particularly to finish this evening, and shall not go further than the terrace.”

So they dispersed, Mrs. Fenton to her comfortable garden chair and the third volume of an exciting novel ; the other two passed down across the lawn and on through the pine trees, whose delicious scent hung heavy on the evening air.

The last touches of the setting sun were crimsoning the quiet waters and glancing athwart the burnt-sienna coloured trunks of the pines, lighting them up in vivid contrast to their dusky branches. There was a stillness and repose in the very air which was soothing, and with a sigh Stewart turned to her companion.

"Basil, when you asked me to fix the time of our wedding, I did not answer, and this is the reason why." She drew the letter from her pocket and gave it to him. He read it, then looked at her bewildered.

"But this is absurd, Stewart ; what does it mean ?"

She shook her head.

"I do not know, I cannot understand, and my aunt will not explain ; she only implores me to abide by his wishes."

"You have the packet that is mentioned ?"

"Yes, but of course I have not opened it. Oh, Basil, it seems so hard !"

"Hard !" he exclaimed impetuously ; "it is most cruel ; but we will see what can be done. Only trust me, dear."

He put his arm round her, and saw her eyes were full of tears.

"Have you felt it so much ?" he whispered.

"It has been a nightmare to me," she sobbed, "ever since I knew that it could not be for so long."

"But it shall be," was the reply ; "in these days such arbitrariness is impossible. Listen, darling ; I will go and ask your aunt the reason ; perhaps she will tell me." He rose as he spoke. "Now wait here for me," he bent over and kissed her ; "say that you trust me."

"I trust you implicitly," she said simply ; "but I have a feeling . . . a presentiment——"

"That all will be well," he interrupted, and he turned away and left her sitting there, sitting pale and fair in the gathering twilight, full of a coming sorrow, of an inexplicable weight of misery. She looked at the view before her with wide unseeing eyes ; the intense quietude oppressed her, and she shivered slightly. The darkness deepened, the sleepy twittering of the birds in the branches overhead had long since ceased, and yet he did not come. One by one the stars came out and the moon rose in the sky, and still she sat immovable, a dull despair making her almost insensible to the flight of time.

At length a sound of footsteps roused her ; slowly they drew nearer, and through the trees she saw Basil, but not the same Basil who had left her. Then he had been full of energy and decision, now he approached as the bearer of bad news. She went swiftly to meet him ; one look was enough, she stood still, then covered her face with her hands.

He put his arms round her.

"My darling, be brave; we must submit."

"You too; oh, Basil!"

"Stewart, you said you would trust me; look at me, dear. God knows it is hard to bear; do not make it worse for me."

She looked up, and in his earnest eyes fixed upon her, she saw a world of grief.

"Tell me," she pleaded, "tell me what it is."

But he only shook his head.

"Do not ask me; I have promised."

She broke from him and stood speechless for a moment, then a harsh discordant laugh rang out in the stillness.

"If you repent of your choice, say so," she cried; "you need not wait five years to find it out!"

He looked at her steadily.

"Stewart, you do not mean what you are saying; you are overwrought. Oh, my darling, where is your faith?"

There was a curious drawn look in her face; she passed her hand wearily across her forehead as though dazed.

"What was it? did some one laugh? Take me home, Basil; I am so tired."

He led her back to the house, where Mrs. Fenton was anxiously waiting: she saw the shock had been great, and without a word she took her to her room, and never left her until she had sunk into a deep sleep.

Meanwhile Basil, too restless to sit still, paced backwards and forwards in an agony of apprehension. The memory of that terrible laugh made him shudder. How would it all end? he asked himself; how could he bear the burden for five long years? But he could find no answer.

From that night there was a great change in Stewart; she was just as loving as before, but the spontaneous gaiety and general brightness which had been amongst her chief charms were no longer there. A listlessness and apathy had taken possession of her, and she did not attempt to shake them off. She felt as if the world were combining to fight against her and ruin her happiness, and a feeling of suspicion was awakened in her.

Basil was gone, but had promised to come down again in six weeks' time, and after that, Stewart was to go and stay with

his people in Wales, so they would not be separated for very long.

The summer days dragged by, and Stewart spent them under the trees, doing nothing ; a book would lie open on her knee, but she rarely, if ever, turned the pages. In vain her aunt coaxed and entreated her to occupy herself, she could make no impression ; the girl's nature seemed totally changed ; and at last she decided that it would be wiser to take Stewart away, hoping that change of scene would in some degree alter the current of her thoughts. She broached the subject, and Stewart acquiesced, but without any apparent pleasure ; she said it did not matter to her where she went or what she did. So Mrs. Fenton wrote to Lady Kemendyne, and asked her to come down and talk the matter over. She came, and was shocked at the alteration in her niece's appearance.

" This will never do, Helen," she exclaimed. " Remember her poor mother ; we must keep her bright and happy until she is twenty-five."

Stewart entered the room as the last words were uttered ; her face flushed, and she turned and went out hurriedly.

Always that fatal time ! always twenty-five ! what could it mean ? Perhaps the fact that she had within her reach the key to the mystery made it more difficult to bear. There was a constant struggle going on—the longing, the insatiable craving to know the worst, whatever it might be, and the reluctance to act directly against her father's express wishes. This struggle was wearing her out, both bodily and mentally. Many a time she unlocked her desk, took out the little sealed packet and looked at it, then put it back. Her aunt had offered to take charge of it, but she had declined to part with it ; there was a fascination about so small a thing, with such power to control her destiny.

Mrs. Fenton often wondered at her brother's act in leaving the knowledge he wished withheld in his daughter's care. But Mr. Glyndon had done it on purpose, as a trial of his child's love and faith, and he had felt sure that a character which could successfully resist such a temptation would only be benefited by having been put to the test.

Occasionally Stewart would, to a certain extent, throw off her depression and be merry like old times, but the change never lasted long, and was always succeeded by a deeper gloom.

At last it was decided that they should go abroad, and the day before their departure Stewart went down to her favourite seat, a spot fraught with memories both sad and sweet.

As she sat there, many thoughts came crowding upon her mind, thoughts sad and rebellious. Until the last two months, she had never known a moment's sorrow, save that great grief of eight years ago; and now, life seemed terribly hard. That her trial need only be for a few years did not make it any easier to bear.

She had thought over it so much that she could think no longer; she became wearied and confused; it was like arguing in a circle, she always came back to the same question—"Why?"

It was getting late in the afternoon, and the sun was beginning to lose some of its force. It was Sunday, and far in the distance Stewart could hear the faint echo of pealing bells borne upon the breeze; presently they ceased, and the all-prevailing calm seemed to enfold her. She looked round quickly once or twice, as though she felt an unseen presence near her; but she was alone. There was no sound or sign of life save the hum of the bees as they hovered from one purple heather bell to another, or the chirruping of the swallows as they glanced swiftly backwards and forwards through the clear air.

She drew out the packet and looked at it. Her mind was in a state of chaos; from thinking so much on one subject, her judgment had become warped. Her heart beat fast, there was a mist before her eyes; she hesitated, and half rose, as if to escape from her thoughts. It was a moment fraught with deadly peril; there was a fierce but brief struggle, she wavered . . . and fell . . . with trembling fingers, as in a dream, she broke the seals! It was done! Before her lay several closely-written sheets in her father's handwriting. The tender words with which the letter began brought the tears to her eyes. She read on. Once she raised her head, a look of horror on her face, but only for a moment; she bent again over the fatal narrative. The sun sank in the west, but she heeded it not, she was absorbed. Now and then a sob escaped her, but still she read on. The twilight grew deeper, the silence greater. At last it was finished. She sat motionless, frozen, petrified with an agony too great for words. "Was this to be her fate? Ah, no! it could not be!" She

rose, and the papers fluttered to her feet ; her white lips moved, but no sound issued from them ; stricken, despairing, she stretched her arms towards the sky : " Not this, oh, not this ! " she whispered ; " anything but this ! " She waited : but through the stillness came no word of hope. Her arms dropped and she sank down by the seat. Mechanically she gathered together the scattered sheets of paper, and endeavoured to fasten them up as they had been before, but she could not. She leaned her head against the tree and closed her eyes—if death would only come !

" Dear God," she moaned, " must I suffer so ? Must I go on living ? May I not die, here and now ? It is not only for myself that I pray—but he too—my beloved."

But the night gave back no answer, nor was there any to comfort her. As the moments passed, her agony grew more intense ; she could have shrieked aloud with anguish. She sprang to her feet, seized with a nameless terror ; the air seemed full of malign influences which pressed round her ; she tried to beat them off, but they drew nearer and nearer. There she stood, unable to move, her face white and drawn with a deepening fear ; then suddenly, with a long low wail of anguish, she fell senseless to the ground, a merciful oblivion blotting out the terrible grief of the present, the dread of the future.

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Two hours later they found her, sitting, singing softly to herself, a vacant smile on her beautiful face.

" Twenty-five, twenty-five," she kept repeating. " I shall be twenty-five soon, Aunt Helen ; when will Basil be here ? "

They saw at once what had happened, and the sheets of paper on the ground told their own tale ; they took her home and cared for her, but they could not restore her reason ; that had escaped for ever. Basil came once to see her, but his presence disturbed her and made her restless ; he was broken-hearted at the terrible change. She was quite quiet and happy ; sometimes she would look at her aunt with a puzzled, half-wistful expression, and ask why the word " twenty-five " always rang in her ears.

" I see it written all round me," she would say ; " it is carried to me on the wind, and the leaves whisper it as I pass ; even the birds sing it over and over again."

But her aunt could only soothe her and hope that time, the great healer, might perhaps "minister to the mind diseased." She never recovered, though she lived for many years; the life that had been so full of gladness was darkened for ever!

* * * * *

The London season was at its height, and the crush at Mrs. Rollestone's "At home" proportionately great, for she was a popular hostess, and her entertainments were renowned for splendour and originality. Two people were talking, when one of them suddenly exclaimed:

"There is Lady Kemendyne; I must go and ask her why her beautiful niece, Miss Glyndon, is not with her. I suppose that marriage will come off shortly, if it has not done so already."

"Have you not heard," said his companion, "the terrible story?"

"No, what story? I have been away all the winter, and only came back a few weeks ago, as you know," and he looked meaningly at the fair face beside him. She turned her head aside and began speaking quickly.

"Poor Stewart Glyndon is hopelessly insane, and I hear that for the last eighteen years her mother has had to be taken care of. It is very sad. Her father married abroad a Frenchwoman, a de Seaumé, and it appears that the members of that family very often go mad between the ages of twenty and twenty-five; if they escape until the latter age, they are safe. Mr. Glyndon did not know this before he married his wife, and the shock was great when, at twenty-three, Mrs. Glyndon became suddenly morbid and depressed, and soon after had to be removed from her home, leaving him with a little child of two years old. He felt it dreadfully, and, I believe, left instructions that his daughter was not to marry before the age of twenty-five. I never heard the exact facts of the case, but I fancy Miss Glyndon got hold of some papers of her father's, and found out the whole story, and it proved too much for her. Lady Kemendyne was more than cut up about it, and I think they were very much to blame in letting her get at any papers at all; they might have known that most likely such knowledge would be disastrous."

"And Lamont, what of him?"

"He is a changed man, and will never be the same again; you

know he is very quiet, and I should imagine his feelings were very deep, only I know it is rather depressing to see him always so taciturn and gloomy ; but as I have never experienced a tremendous shock myself, perhaps I am not competent to give an opinion," and the speaker dismissed the subject with a little laugh.

It was a tragedy which had just ruffled the surface of society for a day or two, and then was buried in oblivion.

Life is so short, why dwell on that which is painful? Why harrow one's feelings with troubles which do not touch us nearly? Why indeed? Rather "let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die"—so say the many.

A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XI.

WARNINGS.

WHEN Ann was released from inspection, instead of going back at once to Blessington Terrace and promptly relieving the anxious minds of her old and young mistress by the proud declaration that her innocence had been unquestionably proved, she made her way in an omnibus to Mrs. Ogilvie's house, where, as she had anticipated at that hour, she found the mistress of it dozing in her bedroom.

She had knocked lightly at the bedroom door, and receiving no response, she opened it less noiselessly than she would have done had she not been labouring under a smarting sense of being a fool for her pains in being there at all.

Mrs. Ogilvie, roused more abruptly from her doze than seemed well to her, gazed at the intruder calmly for a few moments embarrassingly. Then even more embarrassingly she asked :

"Why are you here at this time of day, Ann? You have an easy place indeed and a kind mistress to give you so many afternoons out as you have been having lately."

"A kind mistress indeed!" Ann said, and snorted defiantly.

"A kind and *confiding* mistress," Mrs. Ogilvie said calmly. "I hope you won't give me any cause to regret that I recommended you to her, Ann."

Ann laughed ferociously. The quiet, well-to-do, irreproachable old lady, in the arm-chair by the window was an irritating spectacle to the excited, aggrieved female, who had just been found not guilty of stealing a sapphire and diamond ring.

"It's *I* that have cause to regret your having recommended me to the place, Mrs. Ogilvie—though why I should call you *Mrs.* Ogilvie and you call me mere 'Ann' passes me, as we are cousins. I have been dragged through the streets like a common thief by a constable to-day, and that insulted and worried,

that I wonder I've borne up through it all. Is Dick at home? I want to let him know what I have been led into for his sake."

"Mr. Ogilvie is not here to-day," Dick's mother said coldly. She had been happy to help this less prosperous relation of hers to a respectable occupation in a reputable home. But when the woman forgot herself, and spoke of Mrs. Ogilvie's son as "Dick!" then it was time to take this poor relation (the genus have proverbially hard mouths) on the curb.

Ann plumped down into a chair opposite to the one occupied by her ungracious hostess. She loosened her bonnet strings and cloak, and tried her best to look as if she were feeling at home and comfortable.

"Whether we call him 'Dick' or 'Mr. Ogilvie' doesn't much matter. I am here on his business to-day, and if he is to be seen you had better let me see him—for his sake!" she said, with a poor attempt at being at her ease, which only resulted in a supplicatory air, for which she could have slapped her own face.

Old Mrs. Ogilvie looked her inopportune relation steadily in the face. That dark, swarthy face was deeply flushed now with fatigue, annoyance, indigestion (she had missed her dinner), vindictiveness, and one or two other unbecoming emotions.

"You seem upset about something, and are rambling in your talk, Ann. Why have you been 'dragged through the streets like a common thief?' and why do you want to speak to my son about it?"

Then Ann, to use her own expression, "up and told the whole story."

Without a word of comment, Mrs. Ogilvie rose from her chair as soon as Ann had finished her recital.

"I must go down and give my ladies their tea, so I will say good afternoon to you, Ann," she said coldly, as she advanced to the door and held it wide open. Then as her guest made her exit from the room slowly, she added:

"And I will tell you now what I have thought for a long time and that is, that it would be more becoming for a woman of your years to give her time and labour to doing her duty by her employers and laying up a little nest-egg for her old age, than to be wasting both in running after a young man who does not thank you for your trouble, nor want you to take it. You are old enough to be my son's mother, and there is not a young girl

among the *many he makes love* to, who makes herself such a silly fool as you do about him. I'm his mother, and I know."

Ann stood aghast for a moment. She had always vainly imagined that her overtures had been accepted by Mrs. Ogilvie, as made to herself, not to her son.

"I've always come to you as a humble friend and relation who owes you much should come, Mrs. Ogilvie. Why you should throw Dick—your son, I mean—in my face at this time of day, I don't know. I've been fond of him and kind to him to the best of my power for many a long year——."

"Yes, since he was a lad of sixteen, and you a woman of thirty-six fell in love with him," Mrs. Ogilvie interrupted scornfully. "I am ashamed to say it of one who is a blood relation after all, but you are an old fool, Ann, and my son thinks you one."

"He tells you so? He says that of me?"

"Well, no; he does not *say* it, if it comes to that," Mrs. Ogilvie answered veraciously.

"But he thinks it and looks it, you mean?"

"Now what does it matter to you what he thinks and looks?" Mrs. Ogilvie said equably. "You are a lone, elderly woman who ought to give all your time and thought to providing for yourself in your old age, which is not far off. Thoughts of young men, such as you have, are not becoming at *our* age, Ann."

"I'm younger than you in years," Ann said sulkily. She would have said something much sharper, had she not been restrained by the feeling that this was the only place in which she might ever hope to meet Dick, and that if she gave his mother an excuse for declining to receive her there again, that one poor chance would be lost. Accordingly she "kept a civil tongue in her head," as she told herself, and was rewarded for the effort by Mrs. Ogilvie saying:

"Yes, you are—but you don't look it; you never did, you know, Ann. Step into the back room and have a cup of tea. What time have you to be home?"

Ann wagged her head angrily, but mutely accepted the invitation by following Mrs. Ogilvie into the back room.

"My time's my own till half past seven, then I have to dress Miss Sylvia. Mrs. Gould makes a rare fuss about Miss Sylvia, now that she is going to marry that rich old fella'."

"I wish Dick could forget Miss Sylvia," Dick's mother said with a heavy sigh, considerately.

"Forget her!" Ann snapped; she was stirring up the sugar in a steaming hot cup of tea by this time, and until she had consumed it she knew she was safe in Mrs. Ogilvie's hospitable hands. "Forget her! He hasn't been remembering her very much lately. It's months and months since he asked me to get him a word with her. You needn't trouble about *her*—besides, she's going to be married, and that shows she doesn't think of him any longer."

"Is your tea quite sweet and to your liking, Ann?" Mrs. Ogilvie asked suavely.

"It's beautiful; but I'm not thinking of my tea!—I'm thinking," with a sudden burst of impotent anger, "that it would be better for all of us if you would get Dick to see me for a few minutes. I know he's in London, for I saw him outside our house talking to Miss Warrener this morning."

"Will you have some more bread-and-butter, or will you try this cake, Ann? My ladies like it better than any bought ones. I make it myself. I will give you the proportions if you like to try it. For sixpence, making it with margarine, I make a cake that my ladies like better than what they pay a shilling for at Buzzard's."

"Your cake will choke me till you answer me—*when* can I see Dick? *When* can I see him? It's for *his* sake."

Mrs. Ogilvie drew her massive gold watch slowly from its sanctuary, and consulted it deliberately before she replied:

"If you go at once and catch an omnibus, you will be home just in time to dress Miss Sylvia. I don't expect my son home for an hour or more; then he will be busy dressing to go to a smoking concert. Gentlemen have engagements that you must not think of interfering with, Ann—though you are an old cousin of his mother's."

Having no reasonable grounds for staying after this, Ann went. But she went with a grim sense of injustice being meted out to her by the Ogilvie family, and an even grimmer conviction that the son was as anxious now to shake her off as the mother had been for some time.

"'Gentlemen have engagements that I mustn't think of interfering with,' have they?" she muttered to herself as she trudged

up to Oxford Street to catch the omnibus, "and *gentlemen* must be well dressed to keep those engagements, but some of them are not very particular where the money comes from to buy their swell evening clothes and studs. Oh! Ann Johnson! Ann Johnson! you've been a fool to keep yourself in dowdy old-fashioned gowns that *Mr. Ogilvie* wouldn't be seen walking with for the sake of——! lor! there's my 'bus a-crowded on top, and so stuffy inside that I shan't be cool enough to handle Miss Sylvia's hair when I get home. 'Gentlemen' have engagements that I mustn't interfere with, have they? You may 'whistle' as much as you like to me after this, but I won't come to you, my lad. But there! Why should I spite him, poor fellow, because his mother's that hard and selfish that she wants to keep him all to herself? 'Gentlemen,' indeed! It's my belief that though he may be a gentleman's son, his mother was never that gentleman's wife!" The reflection that there might be some truth in this last conjecture quite calmed and soothed her, and by the time she arrived in Blessington Terrace, her hands were quite cool enough to dress Miss Sylvia's hair, and she had entirely forgiven Dick Ogilvie for having been called a gentleman by his mother.

Sylvia was unusually solemn when Ann came into the room and began making preparations for helping her young mistress to fulfil her *toilette* duties. Things had come to an awkward pass that day about the confidential servant, for Mr. Christopher had confided to Lily that his suspicions of her having stolen Sylvia's ring were by no means allayed by the fact of the working jeweller of Combermere Street having failed to identify her as the person who had sold it to him. Moreover he had added:

"I must say that, without having any desire to be masterful or to exert undue influence over Sylvia's opinions or actions, I cannot approve of the way in which she stands up for and vindicates the woman. It is the same about those horrible dogs, which I hate and detest. I would give her a beautiful thoroughbred Blenheim or King Charles spaniel, an Italian greyhound, or a pug. But she refuses my offer, and clings to these bull-terriers, which are not at all suitable for ladies' pets. They have bad tempers too; on principle, I am averse to keeping bad-tempered dogs about a house. I just pushed one with my foot yesterday, and the brute showed his teeth and growled at me."

Lily laughed and told him:

"It's lucky for you that Sylvia didn't see you push one of her pets with your foot; she would have shown her teeth and growled at you too if she had. She won't have a harsh word or deed given or done to Dick Ogilvie's dogs."

Mr. Christopher writhed through every fibre of the loose, superfluous flesh which encumbered his bulky frame.

"Your mother doesn't allow this man to visit at her house, does she?"

"I don't know about mamma not allowing it; at any rate, he never comes here. I suppose even Sylvia felt that it was better to drop his acquaintance when she ceased to board with his mother. You know mamma is never severe; she just makes us feel that it will be better for us in the end—pleasanter in every way—if she influences us quietly. We get more outings and amusements and new frocks if she is pleased, so we do let her influence us quietly."

"It's astonishing that she should permit Sylvia to retain those dogs," Mr. Christopher observed testily.

Lily smiled seraphically as she replied:

"Mamma doesn't want to have any ructions during Sylvia's last days at home; she knows you will settle those dogs as soon as you're married, and she would rather you bore the storm of Sylvia's wrath than let it burst upon us. Do you know I really pity you when you have to do battle with Sylvia to oust Bubble and Squeak. I think if I were you, I would rather endure the dogs than make her so unhappy and ferocious as she will be when you tell her to get rid of them."

"Would you do battle against the wishes of the man you married for the sake of a couple of curs?"

"They're not curs," Lily said with magnanimous truthfulness; "they're very highly bred. Dick Ogilvie gave Sylvia their pedigree and paid enormous sums for them, I believe. They're not curs; Dick knew Sylvia too well to give her anything that wasn't thoroughbred."

"How the—how on earth did the scamp become so well acquainted with her tastes?" he fumed, and Lily told him pleasantly:

"They were the only young people in the house all those months that Sylvia lived there, and gay youth loves gay youth, you know."

"Of course, of course," he said hurriedly; "she formed these

pernicious associations with boarding-house keepers and bull-terriers when she was a child, a mere child. Since then she has shown more discrimination; I don't anticipate having the slightest trouble in moulding Sylvia to my wishes."

"I'm so glad you don't; it's always such a pity to anticipate trouble," Lily said sweetly, and again Mr. Christopher thought what a charming sister-in-law he would have, and how admirably emeralds and sapphires, and indeed any precious stones became her. He quite wished that he had not liked Sylvia best when he threw the handkerchief, and began to feel that he had acted like an impetuous youth in having made his selection with such undue haste.

CHAPTER XII.

A FAMILY LIKENESS.

THE singing, smoking and drinking, the excitement he went through, and the flattery he received on account of the irreproachable way in which he rendered "My Old Dutch," &c., had no ill effects on the head or general physique of "Our Mr. Ogilvie." That gentleman was on the road at an early hour the next day, driving a fine sixteen hand high bay mare, who inherited her slinging, showy, ground-covering trot from "The Swell"—the sire of many a Grand National and Derby winner—and her staying power and apparently inexhaustible strength from a native born and bred Dartmoor mare.

It was not the day of the month on which it was laid down that he should "take the round" which embraced Prior Common. But he determined on taking it this day and on calling in at Dene Prior, looking up the Rectory people and seeing what Belle Warrener's father was like.

It was characteristic of the vein of happy audacity which ran through his nature that he thought of the young lady who so unmistakably looked down upon him now as "Belle Warrener." She had not scorned or patronized, snubbed or tried to humiliate him in those dilapidated days when he had played the tramp, partly from necessity and a great deal from choice and a love of mystifying amusement. But she had both scorned and snubbed him when he had intercepted her in his smartest, best Bond Street habiliments and endeavoured to coerce her into gaining him those few words with Sylvia Gould for which the passionate portion of his nature pined.

During his previous visits under various guises to the neighbourhood of Dene Prior, he had learnt that the young squire's father had changed his name from Ogilvie to Stanmer for the property. He had not thought much of this at the time, Ogilvie was not an uncommon name ; so although he bore it, and though his mother had always impressed upon him that he was the son of a well-born man, it was only within the last few weeks that he had begun to conjure up the possibility of being a scion of the Dene Prior house.

"Supposing the old Johnnie who changed his name to Stanmer turns out to be my uncle?—or anyway a cousin of sorts of my father's, that bounder who knocked me down for kissing Belle Warrenner will be sorry for having treated his blood-relation like a common vagabond," Dick Ogilvie thought smilingly as he drew up at a side door, and as he did so it opened and two ladies stepped out into the sunlight.

"The old dow. and her daughter, I suppose. Jove! I didn't think the tow-haired squire would have such a lovely sister," he thought, with a dark crisp-haired man's contempt for soft, silky chestnut locks on a masculine head. Then he lifted his deer-stalker from his head with a stiff, courteous, deferential air that reminded Mrs. Stanmer startingly of—some one who had been very dear to her, and of whom she was angry with herself for thinking for an instant in connection with this smart gentleman of the road.

She was passing on with the faintest inclination of the head when he sprang to the ground and stepped up to her.

"Mrs. Stanmer, I presume?" he said, stealing one brilliant look of intense admiration at Rose Davenport as he spoke.

"I am Mrs. Stanmer."

He presented his business-card and raised his cap again, and again Mrs. Stanmer's memory jogged her unpleasantly.

"My son, Mr. Stanmer, is not at home, and indeed if he were, your business is less with him than with the butler," she said with some asperity as she noticed that his card stated him to be an agent for stout and ales as well as for rare foreign vintages.

He laughed good-humouredly—*what* an infectiously merry, good-humoured laugh it was—and replied :

"I always prefer going to headquarters—never deal with the man when I can deal with his master. I ought to have guessed, though, that your son would not be at home this morning. We

kept it up rather late last night at the Ramblers', and he is not like me: I dare not have any to-morrow mornings."

The tone of familiarity, the implication that this man! this tradesman's traveller! had been mixing on terms of equality with Arthur the previous night would have been sufficient of itself to give Mrs. Stanmer an attack of mental prickly heat. But above and beyond the intense irritation caused by his manner and his words was the scalding, smarting sense of having intimately known "some one" who closely resembled him. How could he dare to be like any one whom she had ever known intimately? With less languor than ordinarily characterized her manner—in fact, rather curtly—she again referred him to the butler, and was enjoying the proud consciousness of "having put him in his proper place" when Rose marred that enjoyment by saying:

"What a distinguished-looking man! He's like Mr. Stanmer grown older, darker and stronger. What a good name too—Ogilvie," she continued, as she took the card from Mrs. Stanmer's hand.

"Probably it's merely an assumed name. Don't look back, Rose. These people who come soliciting orders for things one does not want are the pests of country life. I hope Marcroft"—Marcroft was the butler—"will get rid of him and desire him not to call again. There is something about the man's appearance that I don't like at all."

"How odd! Now there is something about his appearance that I like very much indeed," Rose said provokingly.

"That is because you see a fancied resemblance to Arthur in him."

"Indeed no. It's the something in him which does not resemble Mr. Stanmer that attracts me. There are some people one can't help speculating about," the girl went on in her stately, meditative way. "I am afraid it is vulgar curiosity, but I can't help wondering what that man's home and surroundings are like. If he has a wife, is she common-place? and does she see to his dinners and make him comfortable? I should think he would get very tired of a wife who was common-place and 'saw to his dinners' and made him 'comfortable,' shouldn't you?"

"It's the aim and object for which men of that class marry."

"Of what class?" Rose asked innocently.

"The class of—of bagmen, I think they are called." Mrs.

Stanmer spoke with fine scorn, but Rose Davenport was not confused, far less crushed by it.

"I think I should like to know more of men of that class, if many of them are like him." She tossed her head backwards in the direction of the side door, where Ogilvie's smart mare and dog-cart still stood. "They must be much more interesting than men of the class I meet at home."

"Don't speak disparagingly of your own caste, my dear."

"I don't want to disparage it—the fault is in me. I am sure that I don't find it interesting."

Mrs. Stanmer roused herself to remonstrate with this developing radical.

"Men of the class to which this Mr. Ogilvie (as he calls himself) belongs are the *employés* of the City merchant princes whom you profess to find uninteresting."

"Are they really?"

"Why, of course they are, child." The great lady of Dene Prior was waxing impatient. "And—I am sorry that he reminds you of Arthur ever so slightly, for I think he is exceedingly bad style."

"I know a gentleman when I see one," Rose said quietly.

"You are not going to try and annoy me by pretending to think this man is one?"

"I am not pretending, and I am sorry that my genuine opinion annoys you; but whoever he is, and however he has been brought up, and whatever his occupation may be, he comes from a racing stable. I have never made a mistake about either a man's or a horse's breeding yet," the young lady said with perfect politeness but equal resolution.

They had reached the lawn and seated themselves under a copper-beech tree, from which position the obnoxious stranger at the side door was invisible. Still Mrs. Stanmer fretted under the knowledge that he was still there, "wasting Marcroft's time," she told herself angrily. This knowledge, and the fact of his name being Ogilvie and of his bearing a certain resemblance to Arthur, which she could not help seeing, though she denied it even to herself, irritated and unnerved her.

"I hope Marcroft is not gossiping to that man about the family," she said presently in her most autocratic tone.

"Why should he not? There is nothing about the family to be ashamed of, I'm sure."

"Certainly there is not ; but I always distrust travellers and tramps and all unauthenticated visitors. I am told that the reason there are so many successful burglaries carried on is, that servants are led on to give information to these casual people as to where the plate and jewellery are kept."

"Burglars would have a fine haul at Dene Prior ! I could almost burgle myself for the sake of that gold plate," Rose said carelessly. Then both ladies opened the volumes they had brought out with them, and followed the fortunes respectively of Mrs. Clifford's "Aunt Ann," and the buoyant spirits who trip it so lightly through the pages of Florence Marryat's "There is no Death."

While they were improving the time in this way, Dick Ogilvie was spending his pleasantly enough, though, perhaps, unprofitably for his employers. He could not screw an order even for a cask of ale out of the butler, who declared he "couldn't take the responsibility of opening an account with new tradesmen in his master's absence." Dick Ogilvie swallowed his disgust at being called a tradesman, tipped Mr. Marcroft with a sovereign, and then gracefully drifted into a desultory conversation concerning the beauties of the place.

"Fact is, I take an interest in Dene Prior on account of the Ogilvies," he said. "The late man here changed his name from Ogilvie to Stanmer, I find. I think he must have been a cousin of my father's."

"The old master hadn't any cousins that *I* ever heard of," Marcroft said chillingly. "He came into this property through his mother ; she was a Miss Stanmer, and when her brother died childless, her son, Mr. Arthur Ogilvie, was the next of kin, and came into Dene Prior, with only the trouble of changing his name to Stanmer for it."

Dick's dark handsome face grew suddenly alight with a brilliant sanguine suspicion that he might be nearer of kin to the late owner of Dene Prior than he had hitherto dreamed of being.

"Arthur is a favourite name in the Ogilvie family," he said carelessly. "Have you any Ogilvie portraits here ? I don't care about the Stanmers."

"There are portraits of the late master, his father and mother—she that was Miss Stanmer—and his grandfather. If you would like to see them, sir, I will ring the stable-yard bell for your horse to be put up for half-an-hour."

"Thanks, I should," Dick said, and unconsciously he assumed the air of having a right to see the portraits, which impressed Marcroft and made the latter wish that he had not used the word "tradesman" just now.

"Mrs. Stanmer won't come in till the luncheon bell rings, so, though the Ogilvie portraits are in the oak room, where she always sits of a morning, I can show them to you."

For a moment Dick hesitated before crossing the threshold. A sudden repulsion to entering Dene Prior by the side door had seized him. Something told him that he ought not to enter that house in that way.

"By Jove! I don't think I ought to go and spy at the family portraits in your master's absence," he said abruptly, and Marcroft was reminded vaguely by the imperious abrupt manner of some one he had known and probably served, but at the moment he could not put either a name or a date to that "some one."

"Pray don't have any scruples about it, sir," the butler said more obsequiously than he had yet spoken. Then forgetfully he added, "I have permission to show a part of the house, when the doing so doesn't interfere with the privacy of the family. This morning, Mr. Stanmer being still in town and Mrs. Stanmer on the lawn until luncheon, I can show you the oak room."

Dick Ogilvie laughed in a dissatisfied, strained way, stepped across the threshold of the side door and was following his guide, when looking back he saw a stableman roughly chucking at the mouth of his quivering mare.

In an instant he was back in the doorway.

"D——n you! drop her!" he called out furiously. "Does your master let you play the devil with *his* horses' mouths? At any rate you shan't with mine."

He lowered his loud angry tone on the last words, for round the corner of the house came swiftly the handsome girl who a few moments before had been reading on the lawn. She smiled as she saw his embarrassment at having been heard using intemperate language by her. His embarrassment increased when she took the reins gently but very firmly from the groom's hands, and with the words, "Go back to your work, Jones; Mr. Ogilvie and I will take the mare round. Pray forgive me for interfering," she continued, turning to the confused man, "but I happen to love horses and hate stupidity."

"You must not trouble yourself about my mare. I am not worth it," he said warmly.

She was not a bit disconcerted either by his warmth or his humility.

"Probably you are not, but I think the mare is," she said affably. "When we've seen to her well-being, I will take you into the house and show you some namesakes of yours who are very much like you."

"Mrs. Stanmer may not like——" he was beginning, but she checked him.

"Oh, I do as I like here; besides, Mrs. Stanmer is nodding over Aunt Ann's infatuation for a scoundrel. Perhaps you haven't read 'Aunt Ann'?"

He laughed. "There is one duty I never neglect; I always read my *Temple Bar*."

The girl smiled seriously. "The perfect fulfilment of that duty exonerates you from attacking others that are less pleasant, I suspect. Now, come, be quick. I have only ten minutes in which to show you the oak room and the Ogilvies."

She hurried him into the house, through the open door of a dismal oak-panelled room heavily hung with portraits, and, arresting his progress before one of these, she motioned with her hand from the canvas to himself with the introductory words:

"Barring the dress, which is a quarter of a century older than yours, let me make yourself and the portrait of the late Mr. Stanmer acquainted, Mr. Ogilvie. Now I must go back to the lawn. Marcroft will show you the other pictures. Good morning."

"God bless her! she sees I'm a gentleman and a true Ogilvie," said "Dick, the tramp" fervently to himself, as the stately self-possessed young lady went slowly from the room.

"Is that Miss Stanmer?" he asked of Marcroft, who was at his elbow.

"No, sir; it's Miss Davenport, the young lady who is to be Mrs. Stanmer, I believe; that is, we all think the old lady would like it."

"Ah!" was all Dick said aloud, but he thought:

"She licks both Belle Warrener and Sylvia hollow as far as looks and action go, but I don't feel tempted to enter the lists against Mr. Stanmer for her, though her manner to me was devilish flattering, and many fellows would think——"

"You must please to come along now, sir, if you wish to see

any of the other rooms," Marcroft suggested respectfully ; but Dick Ogilvie had seen enough already to satisfy him that he must be a member of the same family as the man who had changed his name to Stanmer to inherit Dene Prior.

"Confound the greedy old fellow for having wolfed my last quid ; I shall have to change a fiver at the village inn," he muttered as he drove away from Dene Prior towards the village. "By Jove ! what a lark it was, to be sure, playing Dick the tramp to a house consisting of Belle Warrener only. I wonder would she have looked after the mare as the future Mrs. Stanmer did to-day ; there's real grit in that girl. I'm glad I'm not in love with her though, my little Sylvia's worth the lot of them."

CHAPTER XIII.

ANN'S ADVICE.

THERE was naturally a good deal said in Mrs. Gould's little establishment about the recovered ring, and the unjust suspicion which had temporarily attached to Ann. Now that she was proved not guilty on the unimpeachable evidence of Melling, the working jeweller, her fellow-servants displayed a good deal of sympathy for her, and some righteous indignation against Mr. Christopher for having offered her the affront of suspecting her of the theft. Ann herself said little on the subject, either to her fellows in the kitchen or to her mistress, when the latter expressed her intense satisfaction at Ann having come out of the compromising situation undefiled. But to Sylvia she was more communicative, and Sylvia felt frightened at some shadow which she could not define.

"You take my advice, Miss Sylvia," the woman broke out suddenly one day, "and when you're married don't let Mr. Christopher go on trying to pry out about that ring. May be there are those concerned in it who you wouldn't like to see brought to open disgrace."

"Then you do know something about it?" Sylvia cried vehemently.

"I know nothing, but I have my own thoughts, Miss Sylvia, and when a young lady takes the losing of her engagement ring as easy as you did, there's generally more than meets the eye. I felt sorry for you, that I did, Miss Sylvia, when I heard the person

who sold the ring wore a long black silk cloak. I couldn't help remembering that your mamma has got such a one——”

“You don't dare to hint that I was the person who sold my own ring,” Sylvia cried out in a burst of mingled amazement, amusement, fury and fright.

“When people are as much in love as you are, Miss Sylvia.—and I know it: haven't you tried to make me your go-between with Dick Ogilvie?—they don't stick at a trifle. He is always wanting money, and you're too fond of him not to give it to him by hook or by crook. The quieter Mr. Christopher keeps about that ring, the better for you, I think.”

There was such insolence subdued, yet apparent in the woman's tone and manner, that Sylvia was nettled into saying:

“I shall let Mr. Ogilvie know how insultingly you speak of him, and I shall tell my mother that you are dangerous and untrustworthy, as you dare to imply such things about me.”

“Imply! Haven't you over and over again given me letters to post to Dick Ogilvie? You've run after that young man, Miss Sylvia, and he—he cared for another woman, only your flatteries made him fickle.”

Sylvia looked her agitated attendant ruthlessly up and down. Then she laughed a light ringing laugh that had the desired effect of making Ann feel her own vulgarity and impotency. But what a mortified, helpless, hopeless *ache* that laugh attempted to conceal!

The immediate outcome of this conversation was that Sylvia made a spasmodic attempt to stay events by pleading with her mother to defer the marriage with Mr. Christopher for six months.

“At the end of six months I shall either be dead from misery or have trained myself down to endure being Mrs. Christopher. Do, mother! *do* put it off for six months.”

“Oh, Sylvia! such a ridiculous, childish, inconsiderate, selfish caprice.”

“It's all that and worse,” Sylvia said stolidly; “but till I can get Dick Ogilvie out of my head I must be capricious in this way, or you must run the risk of my strangling Mr. Christopher. I can't endure the thought of the old brute coming near me.”

“The scandal and disgrace will kill me, and Lily and you will go to the workhouse. Realize it, Sylvia. Think of all the

horrors of poverty which are before you if I die before you are settled in life. My income is an annuity, it dies with me. How are Lily and you to be protected and maintained when I am gone unless you have husbands to protect and maintain you?"

"But, mother, you're not going to die yet?"

"No, I trust not," Mrs. Gould said weepingly, being very much affected at the thought of her own demise; "if things go happily and prosperously with my children, I may reasonably look forward to a few more years of chequered bliss here below. *Such* a man as Mr. Christopher is, too! so honourable, so reliable, so steady."

"And so utterly unlike my poor Dick Ogilvie," Sylvia cut in, laughing ruefully. "Mother, I know it all. I love a ne'er-do-well; if I married him I know he would neglect me and break my heart, still I'm fool enough to wish to marry him. At any rate, I should have a few days of wild happiness, then he would be tired of me, probably go off after some other woman, and I should be able to say, 'I have lived and loved,' before I cut my throat."

"But it doesn't appear to me that he is anxious you should make this tragical sacrifice for him," her mother said coolly.

"Put my marriage off with Mr. Christopher and you'll see."

"Your wedding dress made and fitting perfectly! Your *trousseau* a picture for which I have to pay a price that will deprive me of the necessaries of life for many a month to come."

"Sell it, sell it for what it will fetch; it's better than selling me. Mother, listen to me: I care more for Dick Ogilvie's old pet clay pipe than I do for Mr. Christopher's bulky old body and all his money. Help me not to marry Mr. Christopher. I'll do anything else you tell me to do; I'll earn my own living."

"How?" her mother interrupted quietly.

"How do other girls earn their living?"

"By teaching something—music, singing, dancing, recitations, cookery, needlework; but what do you know sufficiently well yourself to teach?"

"Nothing," Sylvia said humbly.

"Then, my child, what is there before you?"

"Mr. Christopher," Sylvia said hopelessly, and as she spoke her sister Lily came into the room.

"Sylvia, you lazy child, why haven't you been out this morning? I went for a walk in Kensington Gardens, and met Mr. Christopher. We walked up and down those lovely old avenues, and he told me about his place in Devonshire, where he means to live when you're married, Sylvia. It is *so* lovely, and *so* retired. The nearest railway station is three miles off, and you will have very few neighbours, and the few you have will be very stiff and stand-off, because Mr. Christopher is neither a 'county' or a 'service' man. But he says the air is lovely."

"I shall have a town house too?" Sylvia questioned aggressively.

"I don't know. He is thinking better of that town house. He thinks, and I agree with him, that a beautifully-appointed country home will give you a better status than a house that would be only one in ten thousand in London."

"Three miles from a railway station, with stiffish and stand-off neighbours!" Sylvia quoted.

Lily made a little gesture of exquisite scorn.

"What do the neighbours matter, you goose! With your husband's money you can entertain the smartest men in the garrison (that is if he will let you), and where smart men are to be found smart women will go. You needn't trouble your head about the neighbours."

"I am sure Mr. Christopher will never encourage Sylvia to cultivate fast and frivolous society," Mrs. Gould put in admonishingly; "military men are to be avoided by every young married woman who respects herself."

"How few young married women do respect themselves, then," Lily laughed softly. "Don't look so indignant, mamma, dear. You said that actors ought to be avoided by every girl who respected herself when Sylvia fell in love with Mr. Ogilvie."

"I wish you would look upon life more seriously and be less flippant, Lily. You can't conceive how I am worried and distressed by Sylvia's childish vacillation about Mr. Christopher—she wants me to put the marriage off for six months. How I am to break it to him I don't know."

"Shall I break it to him?"

"You!" exclaimed both Mrs. Gould and Sylvia.

"Why not I? I believe I could do it very nicely."

"Her *trousseau* ready, too!" Mrs. Gould nearly dropped a tear or two of vexation as she spoke.

"It's a pity the wedding dress should lie by for six months ; sleeves are sure to alter, and most likely the hang of the skirts will be different," Lily said thoughtfully. "I wonder if it would fit me? If it would it could be cut into a garden-party frock."

"Do try it on, Lily," Sylvia urged, "and if it fits you, wear it when you plead for a delay for me with Mr. Christopher."

"It would look silly to wear it when there was no occasion for it, and I never do anything that looks silly ; but I will try it on," Lily said seriously. "There's no knowing : it may come cheaper for you to give it to me, if Sylvia doesn't want it, than to get another."

"I shall not give in to Sylvia's caprices. I shall not defer the wedding for an hour," Mrs. Gould said, more sternly than she had ever permitted herself to speak to her daughters before, and Sylvia, instead of contesting the point, as her mother feared she would have done, merely shrugged her shapely young shoulders and murmured :

"Very well."

She took her trouble to Belle Warrener that night, opened her heart, not widely, but enough to let Belle see that it was bleeding and bruised, but not a bit contrite.

"If I could see Dick now and he said, 'Come with me, Sylvia,' I would go with him and brave all the scandal and mamma's displeasure without hesitation."

"I don't think you would be such a fool," Belle said.

"Yet you think it will be wrong of me to marry Mr. Christopher?"

"Very, *very* wrong—more than wrong, feeling as you do about that scamp. But if he said, 'Come,' and you went, you would be more than sorry for it the next day."

"You speak as if you knew something very bad about him. Tell it out. Don't beat about the bush. I suppose he ~~has~~ made love to you at some time or other, and now you are annoyed because he doesn't do it any longer. Oh, Belle, forgive me. I don't mean to be insulting, but when it comes to anything about my poor Dick, I lose my head, and the savage comes out in me. If I thought he had ever liked you, I should hate you."

"I think you will hate him when you hear how he behaved to

me," Belle said hotly. Then she told the story of Dick the tramp, the Rectory back lane, the water-meadow cattle-shed, broken meats and bottles of Bass. And when she had finished, Sylvia said calmly :

"I think you were very weak, but I don't blame *him* a bit. He only followed his calling, and acted for his daily bread. But you were horribly forward and bold to have let him kiss you——"

"I didn't let him," Belle interrupted indignantly.

"Well, he did it, whether you let him or not. It was only stage-business to him, and I don't see why you should blame him for it. He was awfully hard pressed at the time, poor fellow."

"Don't speak of him so tolerantly, Sylvia, and do be a dear little wise girl, and banish him from your heart and thoughts."

"I can't—I can't!" Sylvia said with desperate emphasis. "His face, and his trick of saying things, and his earnest eyes, come between me and everything. Oh, Belle, do tell me that when he kissed you, he didn't do it as if he loved you? It was acting? They were stage-kisses? Tell me so."

"They may have been stage-kisses for all I know. They were very unpleasant, and the only man I shall ever care for in this world saw them given to me, and threw me over from that day to this," Belle said regretfully.

"I should explain things to that man, if I were you, Belle. Tell him that to your certain knowledge Dick Ogilvie was just adoring another girl at the time—I can show letters to prove it—and the episode with you was merely a pastime—a bit of acting. He has told me often that, though he has to kiss pretty girls on the stage, it's mere 'business,' and he hates doing it."

"He didn't seem to hate kissing me," Belle said with reckless veracity.

The very memory of Dick's caresses was odious to her; at the same time she objected to the implication that they were bestowed in artistically cold blood in the mere way of "business."

"Poor Dick! Poor fellow! You say he was nearly starving that day. Isn't it awful to think of a man like Dick being hard-up and hungry?"

"He is very able-bodied—he could always have found work if he had looked for it, I should think."

"Not congenial work. Not such as a gentleman could take."

"Surely he might have found work more suited to his gentlemanly hands than cadging on a girl."

"Belle, you are rather coarse, and a little bit cruel to him," Sylvia cried, with tears in her eyes.

"And you are inclined to be a little bit too kind, Sylvia dear."

"Ah, you don't know what it is. When a man has told you that you have been his salvation, and saved his life, and that he's ready to give that life for you any day, what *can* you do?"

"Not believe him."

"That shows me he has never made real love to you, for if he had, you would believe him—you couldn't help it," Sylvia said triumphantly. "There must be something very good about him," she went on. "His mother idolizes him, and old Ann, who has known him ever since he was a baby, worships him. Don't you, Ann?" she asked, as the confidential servant came into the room.

"Don't I what, miss?"

"Worship Mr. Dick Ogilvie."

The blood came up in a scorching blush to Ann's swarthy cheeks.

"He's a blood relation of mine, and blood is thicker than water; but I'm not blind to his faults and his falseness, and it's a pity you are, Miss Sylvia. Mr. Christopher may be cumbersome to look at, but he's worth a hundred of Richard Ogilvie."

"Sylvia, it's degrading to let your servants speak to you in such a way," Belle said indignantly, as Ann went out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

And then Sylvia lamented, in an access of nerve and heart weariness, that she "had no one to turn to—no one, now Dick was gone."

(To be continued.)

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A Bad Lot.*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I AM GOING TO TAKE CARE OF YOU."

THE following afternoon, rather to her surprise, Nell found that Cecil was waiting for her at Liverpool Street Station, in order to see her off by the three o'clock train. She knew that he was very busy, and that it must have given him some thought and trouble to accomplish this, and she felt that she ought to be duly gratified by the attention; yet, somehow, she was scarcely glad to see him.

When he had looked after her luggage and taken a place for her in the train, had secured her a foot-warmer, and bought every newspaper and magazine that he could find for her amusement during her solitary journey, there still wanted some six or eight minutes to the hour, during which they walked up and down the platform together.

Cecil was in good spirits and very affectionate in his manner. Nell was *distracted* and somewhat apathetic. The conversation of the previous evening, which had produced in him a sense of elation and of satisfaction, had left her sore and unresponsive towards him, whilst his words and questionings, that had been so immediately followed by that half-glimpse of a face that had gone by in the darkness, had depressed and subdued her with a sense of impending calamity.

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"By the way, Nell," Cecil was saying to her, and they were the first words he had spoken that had aroused any interest in her, "I never told you what an impression you made the other night on my friend Temple. He was quite enthusiastic about you."

"Did he talk about me to you, then?" she inquired a little quickly, feeling all at once that men were hateful, every one of them! and that she detested them all.

"Oh yes, I should rather think he did! And let me tell you, Nell, that is a very great compliment from old Julian, for he is the most inveterate woman-hater and the most determined old bachelor that I ever met. He cares for nothing but his sport and his books. He never takes the slightest notice of any woman, and he looks upon love and marriage as positive misfortunes to mankind."

"I ought, then, I suppose, to be very much flattered by his approval of me," remarked Nell coldly.

"Well, it certainly shows that he was really impressed by you, and I was naturally pleased at his telling me how much he admired you; it is your conversation which seems to have especially delighted him."

Nell made no answer, and Cecil cried out immediately:

"Talk of the old gentleman! Why, if there is not Julian Temple himself! He must be going by this train. Hullo, Julian, old man, where are you off to?"

Mr. Temple, who wore a rough travelling ulster, a pot hat, and carried a gun-case in his hand, stopped and returned his friend's greeting, taking off his hat to Nell, who bowed to him so very distantly that for a moment he thought she did not recognize him.

"I am going down to a place called Dinely, just beyond Fenchester, for some shooting," he said, in answer to Cecil's question. "Are you going to the same part of the world?"

"No, I am not; but Miss Forrester is going home by this train. Marshlands is the last station before you get to Fenchester. You might look after her for me, Julian, as she is travelling alone."

Temple bowed. "Delighted, I am sure; if there is anything I can do for Miss Forrester I hope she will command me. But I will not inflict myself upon you by the way, Miss Forrester, for, as you see, I am smoking."

"Now isn't that just like old Temple?" cried Cecil, laughing, as his friend walked away in the wake of a porter, who came to

relieve him of his gun-case. "I told you he was a woman-hater! I believe he would rather perish than be bottled up alone in a railway carriage for two hours with a woman. Even you, Nell; are not sufficiently attractive to him for that. But come, you ought to be taking your place; time is just up."

The parting words between them were necessarily brief and hurried, and a few minutes later the train was steaming slowly out of the station.

Nell sat by herself in her corner, surrounded by the literature which Cecil had provided for her entertainment. She did not look at it. The newspapers and magazines lay unheeded beside her.

Her eyes were fixed vacantly out of the window upon the swiftly shifting scene. The crowded eastern district, with its countless rows of mean and squalid houses, with the factory chimneys rising up gaunt and tall amongst them; the long line of ships' masts, stretching away like a leafless avenue towards the horizon, along the course of the invisible river; then those wide, desolate spaces—unlovely and repulsive wastes, that cling to the outskirts of a great city, set round with blackened fields and stunted shrubs; then, by-and-by, neat suburban villas, each in its trim garden; then more fields—broad green meadows these, interspersed with lanes and woods and streams, with farms and nestling villages amongst them, and here and there an ivy-covered tower or pointed spire; till at last London and its filthy slums and its trim suburbs is left altogether behind, and the wide, sweet-scented country opens out on either side.

Nell sat looking at all these things as they flew past her, with eyes that saw none of them. Her own thoughts engrossed her so completely that she was blind to all outward things.

Her whole mind was filled with one thing, one individual; she could think of nothing else. It was not Cecil Roscoe, her lover, whose farewell words might still have been ringing in her ears, who thus absorbed Nell Forrester's thoughts. Neither was it that other dark figure, who had flashed back again out of the shadows of the past so unexpectedly and so startlingly last night into living reality.

All night long, indeed, she had lain awake, thinking about Vane Darley. Her mind had worn itself out in vain conjectures as to the whys and wherefores of his reappearance. For many

hours, indeed, she had tried to cheat herself into the belief that she had been mistaken, and that the man that had passed her in the darkness of the park was some stranger, whose chance resemblance to Darley had quickened her pulses into a momentary delusion. But she knew this was not the case; she knew perfectly well that it was Darley himself. His face was thin and aged, and he looked ill, but it was Darley all the same. He had not changed so much as to leave her in any real doubt about his identity. The bare fact of his having returned to England and of her having seen him was sufficiently disturbing to her peace of mind. To meet him again, just now, was the very last desire of her heart. She wanted to cover up and forget that past chapter of her life, to deny it altogether if necessary, not to have it thus forcibly brought back to her in all its undying intensity.

Towards morning she had fallen into an uneasy slumber, and with daylight, as is so often the case after a sleepless night of anxieties, that are apt to assume exaggerated proportions in our minds during the hours of darkness, things presented themselves to her in a somewhat less formidable aspect. For if she had seen and recognized Colonel Darley, she was, at any rate, perfectly convinced that he had not seen her. Even had he seen her, she felt certain that passing her thus, in the darkness, it would have been impossible for him to have recognized her. She had grown out of all knowledge. She had changed from a lanky, half-fledged girl into a tall and fully-developed woman. Moreover, it seemed to her highly improbable that he would even remember her now. That which was so dire and terrible a memory to her, was no doubt to him, only one out of the many insignificant nothings upon the troubled stream of a dark and stormy life. She resolved to tell no one, not even her grandmother, that she had seen him, and she told herself that, in all human probability, she would never come across him any more. It was not Vane Darley who troubled her at this moment.

The man who now filled her whole mind so as to leave room for no other thought or feeling within her was Julian Temple.

An unreasonable anger against him overpowered her. He had talked her over with Cecil! discussed her looks, probably—praised her intelligence—and made merry with him, no doubt, over the conversation they had had together. And she, who had rashly opened out her innermost heart and soul to this man, who had

talked to him freely of those vague dreams and fancies which she had never put into words before, who had believed herself to have been understood, and that she had in return been the recipient of his most sacred confidences! And all the time he had only been drawing her on, turning her inside out, as it were, in order to "damn her with faint praise" to Cecil; and, no doubt, to turn her into ridicule afterwards to other people!

She remembered that it was what Miss Vincent had said of him—that he was false and dangerous, a man to be dreaded and avoided.

"I hate him!" said Nell aloud to herself in the solitude of her carriage. "How I hate him!"

The tears stood in her eyes as she spoke the words, and yet assuredly they were not all tears of hatred and of anger. There must have been something else, some other feeling more subtle still, down in the very depths of her heart to have disturbed her so much. She thought of him now, travelling eastwards in the same train as herself—alone, perhaps, too, as she was alone.

Why had he refused to travel down with her? Why had he put this needless and humiliating slight upon her? Was it not that he despised her; that, in spite of his pretended admiration and interest in her, he did not apparently consider her society worth his while to seek? She recollected that he had not spoken to her again that evening at Mrs. Roscoe's; he had not even wished her good-night; he had gone away hurriedly soon after the gentlemen had come upstairs, without throwing so much as a look in her direction.

And then the tears that were filling her eyes rolled slowly over and dropped, one by one, down upon her hands.

"There is something unlucky about me," she thought sadly; 'there is a fatality against me! Well, I have always got Cecil; I suppose I ought to be satisfied, for he is kind and good. I wonder why I begin to find him so tedious and so irritating? I must be very ungrateful, for he is staunch and true; although I suppose his mother detests his engagement, and he himself disapproves of me, so there can be very little inducement to him to stick to me. I wonder whether I shall have got sick to death of him between this and Easter!"

And then she took up *The World* and tried to become interested in it. But November afternoons are short, and very soon

the greyness of dusk began to steal over the wintery landscape, through which the express train rushed ceaselessly on. There was a heavy, lowering sky, but no rain ; only the wind rose sullenly and swept in long melancholy gusts over the world. It was the sort of evening that warned one that there would be storms at sea to-night. The riven clouds parted now and then into ragged, tattered spaces, through which a pale sky gleamed with momentary flashes of light, and then, once more, they banked themselves up into dark and frowning masses.

Nell could not see to read any longer, she leant back in her corner and strained her eyes for some time, peering out into the ever-increasing darkness. Then, because she had slept so badly last night, and because she was worn out and wearied by conflicting and harassing thoughts, her eyes insensibly closed. The rhythmical noises of the swift-rushing train began to mingle with her thoughts, and the thoughts themselves grew blurred and indistinct, the even throbbing sounds mixing themselves up strangely and harmoniously into fragmentary, half-conscious dreams, until, at last, even these ceased altogether—and Nell fell soundly asleep.

For a long time there was silence, and all the vexed problems of her life were at rest. Then, all at once, she started up wide awake and breathless, with a sudden rush of blood to her head and heart, and with that queer instantaneous conviction of something being wrong that attacks one at the very first breath of returning consciousness. The train had stopped. Yet there were no station lights ; no light at all through the utter darkness without, only a sound of voices—confused shouts and questions—a vague Babel of ever-increasing human consternation that mingled strangely with the moanings of the wind. Nell looked at her watch—in about twenty minutes time she was due at Marshlands. Why, then, was the train at a standstill ? There could be no station here within five or six miles. She began to be frightened, and let down the glass and leant out. What she saw was not calculated to reassure her ; heads were leaning out of every carriage window ; a few passengers had alighted, and all were shouting questions to the guard, or exchanging apprehensive remarks to each other. The guard ran rapidly past her carriage.

“ What is the matter ? why are we stopping ? ” she cried out with the rest.

He did not answer her, but only ran on the faster, the bull's-eye lantern that swung in his hand flashing a fluttering light into the darkness as he hurried by.

At that moment a face that she knew looked up at her from below the carriage.

"Is that you, Miss Forrester? Don't be frightened."

"Oh, Mr. Temple!"

There was a ring of intense relief in her voice. How glad she was to see him! She forgot all about her anger and her hatred.

"What is the matter? Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing with our train; but the signals are against us. As far as I can gather there seems to have been some accident or break down in front of us to a luggage train. I understand the line is not clear; we may be kept, that is all."

Just then the guard came back with the stoker, running hard; as he came he called out some directions at each carriage door and opened it as he passed.

"What does he say?" faltered Nell.

"We are all to get out; there is another train behind us; the stoker is going to run back to the signal box behind to stop it; there is no danger," he added reassuringly, "only he says it will be safer to get out."

"No danger, sir," and the guard echoed his words as he threw open the door of Nell's carriage. "She can't be up for another ten minutes, and he'll be able to get back to the signal box to stop her in plenty of time; but it's best to be on the safe side."

The passengers did not need to be told this twice; everybody scrambled out of the train in double-quick time with as much alacrity as though the expected train were actually in sight.

Temple helped Nell to jump down from the carriage. She was trembling very much, but she did not speak.

"I am afraid you will be cold. You may as well have your cloak," he said, as they were moving on, and he turned back towards the carriage in order to fetch it from the rack, where in her hurry she had forgotten it. For a moment Nell lost her head; she caught him by the arm and tried to draw him back.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't go back! What does it matter about the cloak? Pray, pray, don't go back to the carriage; the other train might come. I entreat you not to go."

He looked at her for half a second with a little surprise. The lights from the train shone full upon her face; he saw that she was white down to her lips and that her eyes were full of terror. There was a note of positive agony in her voice.

He disengaged himself quietly from her clinging hands.

"There is no danger at all. Did you not hear the guard say that there were ten minutes to spare? And you must have your cloak. I shall not be a moment gone. Please stand back a little farther—go off the line by the hedge, you will be out of the crowd there, and I will come back to you immediately."

When he came back to her with the cloak over his arm he found that she was sobbing quietly but almost hysterically. He wrapped the cloak carefully and tenderly around her, and then he drew her arm under his. Her sobs ceased at once and she became perfectly calm.

"There is nothing at all to be frightened at now, everybody is safe, and the man will in all probability be in loads of time to have the other train stopped at the signal. You are not frightened now, are you?"

"Oh, no. Please forgive me for being so stupid," she added shyly.

"It was not stupid; it is perfectly natural that you should be upset. But it is all right; I am with you, and I am going to take care of you."

A sense of safety, of peace and protection, stole over her at his words. Somehow she minded nothing any more now, although they were stumbling over some rough broken ground and she could not see a yard before her, and nearly tumbled on her nose.

"I am going to take you across this stony place into that field," he went on. "I see something that looks like a fallen tree or stump out there, and if you will sit down and wait for a few minutes, I will go and see what I can find out about the chances of our being able to get on."

She raised no objection, and he left her about fifty yards from the line in a field by the side of a straight, narrow dyke, where the root of a fallen pollard willow that slanted across the stream afforded her a seat.

She sat quite still and waited for him. Now that she had her cloak she was not at all cold, although it had not been the cold

that had made her tremble. She felt quite warm now and strangely happy.

And yet the position was not a very cheerful one.

The arrested train lay in front of her like a great shining serpent, the engine snorting forth fire and steam redly against the dark sky, and the long line of lighted windows curving away behind it into the gloom. The passengers were mostly huddled together for companionship and comfort in a little crowd near the guard and the engine driver; a few of them had, like herself, strayed across the railway and the narrow ditch into the fields, and were walking up and down either to keep themselves warm or to curb their impatience.

Presently Temple came back to her.

"I am so sorry—I am sadly afraid that we shall have a long time to wait. A man has just come up from the next station to say the line won't be clear for at least an hour. I am so afraid you will catch cold. You must not, at any rate, sit still." He held out his hand to her and made her rise from her lowly seat.

"Where are we?" asked Nell. "I can hardly see yet, but I ought to know where we are."

"The guard says about six or seven miles from Marshlands—that is your station, is it not? But the luggage train has gone off the rails about three miles off. Miss Forrester, I wonder how it would be if you were to walk home? It has just occurred to me that if you knew your way it would be much better for you than standing shivering here. The luggage, of course, will be taken on to Fenchester in time, and if you are a good walker I believe it would be the best thing to do, for one cannot tell how long it may be before the line is clear."

Nell had turned round. She was shading her eyes with her hands and peering into the darkness behind her. All at once the hurrying clouds parted a little in the west, and a pale and watery moon struggled faintly out for a moment from behind them. Nell caught sight of a familiar object: a little cluster of cottages nestling together in a hollow of the flat country, and a low church tower with a whirling weathercock, that glittered for a moment in the faint moonlight.

"Ah, I know perfectly where I am," she cried. "That is the village of Coldbeach. There must be a road on the other side of this dyke. I know the way very well indeed; it is only about

five miles from here to Marshlands House. I can find my way home easily."

"But can you walk so far?"

"Oh, yes. Fancy asking a country-bred girl if she can walk five miles!" and Nell laughed quite merrily. "I am quite sure, Mr. Temple," she continued, "that it will be much the best thing to do as you say; for it is not only the waiting, but I am afraid my father and sisters might be anxious; they may perhaps hear that there is an accident on the line, and if I don't turn up——"

"Yes, I had thought of that too. That decides it. If you will describe your box to me, I will go and speak to the guard about the luggage."

He went, and very soon returned to her. The moon was struggling out once more, although the wind seemed to be rising.

"If you will just see me across this field into the road, Mr. Temple," said Nell, as he rejoined her, "that is all I shall want. I shall be all right then, and be able to get home perfectly."

"What do you mean?" he said, drawing her hand under his arm and peering down to look at her face under her hat. "You don't suppose that I am going to leave you to walk home by yourself, do you? That would be a curious arrangement, truly! Have I not told you already that I consider you to be under my charge? I am going to take care of you."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THE "ROMANCE" WAS CONTINUED.

IT was a wild, rough night, yet the moon shone out fitfully from behind the hurrying clouds that racked across the wind-driven sky. In the intervals of light the whole flat country shone like burnished silver, and everything prosaic and homely became softened and poetized under the tender radiance. The ugly little cottages, the pollard willows along the straight dykes, the clusters of farm buildings and hay-stacks, dotted sparsely across the wide plain, were transfigured into loveliness by the enchanting witchery of the white moonlight. Then the moon would withdraw herself again behind the swift rushing clouds, and all would be plunged once more into impenetrable darkness.

It was now past six o'clock, and the wind had risen very much. The willows bent and lashed their boughs to the fury of it; the

scanty grass in the meadows was swept like the surface of a lake by its violence ; far away to the north a windmill flung its gaunt black arms wildly into the air, and Nell Forrester, with bent head and tottering steps, had sometimes hard work to keep her footing, even although she clung to Julian Temple's strong supporting arm.

Eddies of dust—the prelude, perhaps, of rain—spun along the straight white road before them ; and presently out of the dim mystery of the night, a flock of wild duck rose from the oozy marsh hard by, whirling with eerie cries and a loud fluttering of wings close over their heads, ere they vanished quickly into the blackness of the sky.

They had now left the stranded train far behind them ; the twinkling lights of the village of Coldbeach had faded away ; all was wide, and vast, and empty on every side of them ; their solitude was as complete as though they had been in a desert.

For some time they hardly spoke, for it was hard work to breast the boisterous wind, and there seemed a certain physical impossibility of starting anything like coherent conversation. Yet, perhaps, there were other secret influences at work in the heart of each that helped to keep them silent.

“Do you find it very hard work?” said Temple at length, as a fiercer blast seemed to threaten to blow them both away.

“Oh no, I love it !” cried Nell, and the suppressed excitement in her ringing voice made him look at her curiously. The moon at that moment shone full in her face ; he could see that her eyes danced and sparkled, that her parted lips were lines of scarlet, and that there was a flush of crimson roses upon her cheeks.

“Don't you love the wind?” she continued gaily. “I am so used to it. I have been out in it all my life. Nowhere, except, I suppose, on the sea, does the wind blow as it does here across these dear level plains of my native country.”

“Yet is a very rough night for a lady to be out in,” he demurred.

“It is delicious, and I adore it !” she cried with enthusiasm. “See how the moonshine washes across the world, and how the black clouds hurry along to catch up the light ; and then the rough wind comes roaring after them both. Oh, it is glorious ! Feel how the wonderful invisible thing whirls about us both ! Does it not seem to blow right through one, knocking away by the sheer force of it everything that is base and mean and

cowardly within one? blowing it all clean away out of one's soul and leaving it empty, and swept of all that is evil."

His heart began to beat in sympathy with her thought.

"It is here that the first chapter of my 'romance' must be written; and it is you who are my priestess and my inspiration," he said quickly, losing his head a little as he caught the infection of her mood. "See yonder! There go the 'Risen Souls,' flying with the clouds across the world! Miss Forrester, from where do you get your ideas? they are immense! It seems to me that you must know and understand the sea as well as you do the fens, to love these wild winds so dearly. Have you ever been on a yacht?"

For a moment her heart stood still, and the buoyant exhilaration of her mood changed.

"Once. A long time ago," she answered in a low voice. For the whole world and its kingdoms she could not have given an evasive answer to Julian Temple.

"And you loved it? The waves as well as the winds must have set your pulses dancing?" he asked, longing to draw her out still more.

"Yes, I loved it! I remember how the spray dashed into my face, and how my hair blew long and wide behind me, and how the sails swung and courtesied to the breeze, and the sea-gulls whirled their white wings about the hurrying ship. But," and she seemed to recall herself with an effort from a pursuance of these recollections, "but it was a long time ago, and I was only a child."

Something in her manner set him wondering when it was—whose yacht she had been upon, and where she had sailed.

"It is a pity that you, who love nature so well, should not see more of the world; but perhaps you may travel some day."

"It is not likely—we are poor, you see, and poor people stay at home."

"But when you are married? perhaps you will go abroad with Cecil?"

"Oh—Cecil!" her voice became uninterested. The mention of her betrothed's name brought her thoughts swiftly down again from heaven to earth. "I had forgotten Cecil," she added simply, and almost too truthfully for prudence.

The words set him thinking.

"After all, what does it matter?" he said to himself. "One evening—and then no more of it! Until I stand behind a

white-robed bride at the chancel step, and find myself forced into the *role* of her bridegroom's friend and supporter. After to-night I shall certainly not see her again till her wedding day. What harm can it do her, or me, that we should become friends and talk openly and freely to one another? Besides, I cannot help myself—it is not my doing that we are here alone together in the darkness and the solitude. I did not seek this position; it was forced upon me by fate."

Then she spoke again, and he shook himself rid of yet another thought that flashed into his mind, and that was not over profitable to dwell upon.

"What an odd thing life is!" Nell was saying musingly; and in her words there seemed a faint echo of his own thoughts. "How strange that you and I should be here, alone together in this wild darkness—just you, and I, and the silent world! I feel as though we had been friends for years. And yet, would you believe it, Mr. Temple? an hour ago I hated you, and swore to myself that I would never speak to you again."

"My dear Miss Forrester!" he exclaimed in unfeigned amazement at this astounding confession. "You *hated* me! Great God! what had I done?"

Nell laughed merrily; she was clinging with both hands to his arm, simply in order to steady herself; and her hurrying feet tripped double time to his long footsteps—much as on that other evening long ago she had clung to Vane Darley's arm, and had danced along beside him; for her mood had changed, and she was a child again.

"It sounds horrible, does it not? But it only means that I was foolish and fancied things. I had got it into my head—it was from something Cecil said to me—that you were only laughing at me the other night, and that you repeated to him all we had talked about together. I—I could not have borne it," she added, with a little hot impatience. "If you had done so, I should have been right to hate you, should I not? But I am sure it is not true, and that you did not."

"Certainly I did not," he answered, a little soberly. "Did Cecil say so?"

"Not exactly. Oh, no; he only said that you had spoken about me afterwards to him. It was all my own stupid fancy, I am sure, that you had repeated to him the things we had talked about."

The "we" struck with an inexpressible charm upon his ears, and then he pulled himself together and shivered a little.

"I should never have dreamt of doing so," he answered after a moment, very gravely indeed; and then he was silent for a long time—thinking deeply.

He was puzzled and perplexed. That Cecil did not the least understand or appreciate her had been patent to him from the first. Cecil was very much in love with her—so much was he in love that he had flung to the winds, for her sake, much of his natural prudence and circumspection. He was, indeed, prepared to make what was undoubtedly a very bad and undesirable marriage for the love of her; and yet Julian had been quick enough to perceive that Cecil was merely under the spell of this girl's wonderful personal charm—he was not in the least alive to the especial beauty of her mind. But at least he had supposed that Nell herself must be genuinely fond of her lover; yet now, after what she had just said, he began to doubt even this. Neither, on the other hand, did she seem to him to be the sort of woman who would be likely to marry a man from merely mercenary motives. Besides, Cecil, although fairly well off, was by no means a catch in the matrimonial market. If she did not love and believe in him with all her heart, what in the name of fortune was she going to marry him for?

He argued the question out within his own mind, simply and solely as an independent bystander—or so he told himself. He was the friend of both. Was there nothing that, as a friend, he could do to bring about a deeper sympathy between them?

Meanwhile, Nell was chattering to him lightly and gaily, unconscious of the tempest of contradicting thoughts which she had aroused in him. She was telling him about her sisters: about Dottie and her betting, about Millie and her mania for horses and dogs, and all about the crowd of admirers—Messrs. Popham and Drake and Toulmin—and their nicknames, and of how they kept the house alive by their comings and goings.

"Not that they amuse me at all, Mr. Temple; for, as a matter of fact, I think them all terribly uninteresting."

He listened with a half attention. He was still thinking about Cecil, and wondering why in the world she was going to marry him. A sort of dogged determination was upon him; he was bent upon assuming the attitude of mediator between her

and him. He told himself that he was Cecil's friend, first and foremost, and he forced himself to lead the conversation back to him; and yet all the time he was secretly conscious—with a consciousness that irritated him—that it was not so much in Cecil's interests as because of a burning and altogether reprehensible curiosity to fathom the depths of Nell's heart that he did so.

"Cecil is such a good chap," he observed, breaking in upon her confidences about her family.

"Cecil? Oh, yes, he is." Nothing more.

"I am glad that he is going to be so thoroughly happy; no one deserves it more."

Nell laughed.

"Will he be so thoroughly happy? I thought you looked upon men about to marry as suicidal maniacs, Mr. Temple. Cecil himself told me so. He says you are a woman-hater."

"That is because I am not married myself. An old bachelor is always called a woman-hater."

Nell would have liked to ask him why he did not marry, but she had not the courage, and Julian profited by the moment of silence to drag back Cecil's name by the head and heels—she should not evade the subject like this.

"I hope that you and Cecil will be very happy," he persisted, a little stupidly perhaps.

"Thanks. That is very kind of you. I daresay we shall get along as well as most married couples do."

"Miss Forrester, I cannot bear that strain of cynicism in you. In heaven's name, why, at your age, fresh and unspoilt as you are, with youth, and beauty, and a lover who is devoted to you, why should you speak like a hardened woman of the world who has found out the bitterness and the falseness of life's promises? I cannot understand it in you—cannot reconcile it with what I know of you."

He spoke hotly, from his heart. Cecil and his interests faded once more out of his mind. It was Nell, half child, half woman, with the soul of a poet and with the heart of a cynic, that absorbed him now.

"Why should you suppose me to be what you say—fresh and unspoilt?" she asked in a low voice. "You don't imagine that because I have my dreams and my ideals, I am so foolish as

to believe I can ever realize them? There can be no greater mistake than that. I am young, as you say—I am twenty-one, but at twenty-one a woman is old enough to be disillusioned. Do you suppose I don't know how hard the world is upon girls who have been brought up as I have been? We Forresters have a bad name, Mr. Temple, from Granny downwards—for Granny was a Forrester herself, you know; she and my grandfather were first cousins—and we are all pariahs. No one knows this better than you do. Cecil knows it, too; and so does his mother, who will not be civil to me as long as there is a hope that Cecil may throw me over between this and Easter. And so he would, if it were not that he is in love with me. Oh yes, I will do him that justice; he does love me now very much. It only remains to be seen whether in the long run he does not love his mother and respectability better."

"What you say grieves me very much," said Temple in a low voice of constraint. "I had hoped and believed that you were both so happy; and, indeed, I think that Cecil will be more staunch and faithful than you seem to fear; but you—with these doubts of him—you——?"

"Ah! you think that I ought to be too proud to take a husband on those terms. Well, I am proud—proud enough to feel it, God knows!—but not proud enough, perhaps, to throw away my only chance of passing through the magic doors of that world of yours, Mr. Temple—that world where girls have had careful fathers to stand by them and protect them, and good mothers who have trained, and taught, and watched over them all their lives, so that they have had no chance of learning—things—that I have learnt. How cruel the good people inside those doors are to those who stand outside! And how glad they are to shut them to in their faces if they presume to try and push themselves through! Oh! it is not a kind world at all, that world to which you belong—only, it is better, perhaps, than ours, because if you are once inside you don't get condemned without being tried—'hung without benefit of clergy,' as they say."

"But you care for Cecil? surely you care for him?" he persisted with a feeling of blank dismay.

"I am very fond of Cecil," she answered simply, but without any rapture at all. "If I were not, I should not have said I would marry him, I suppose. But I am not at all fond of Mrs.

Roscoe, or of Mrs. Torrens—neither are they fond of me,” she added, with a hard little laugh. “Mr. Temple, I cannot think why I am saying all this to you—you don’t think very badly of me, do you?”

She looked up anxiously into his face, that was very grave and overcast; unconsciously she seemed to draw a little nearer to him, and unconsciously, too, he tightened the pressure of his arm a little upon hers.

“Think badly of you? Oh no; how could I do that? My dear little girl, if you only knew how sorry I am for you! I would do anything in the world to help you—you and Cecil; and some day I am sure all these troubles and uncertainties will pass away, and life will be brighter when you begin it afresh as his wife. I understand well that in many ways things must be very difficult to you just now. What you are pleased to call ‘my world’ is a somewhat conventional place, and its inhabitants do not understand deviations from the beaten tracks; but although I myself am something of an outlaw at heart, as I told you, I think that, for a woman at least, the beaten tracks are safer.”

Nell sighed. “Ah! and our tracks at Marshlands are anything but ‘beaten’!—as you would say if you were to see us Forresters at home. What Cecil must have suffered passes my comprehension now that I have beheld him at the other extremity of the Pole. There is Marshlands in front of us, Mr. Temple,” she added, pointing to where a long, low house, with lights in some of its lower windows, loomed darkly out of the gloom in front of them.

During the last two miles the country had become less bleak and bare; a few low-lying woods broke the monotony of the plain, and they had crossed the river Laze, winding through the meadows in serpentine coils that gleamed like silver under the moonlight.

“You will come in, will you not, Mr. Temple?” said Nell, as they neared the dilapidated gates and the empty and deserted lodge. “We are a queer rough lot, but my father would like to thank you, I know, for bringing me home.”

“No, thank you, Miss Forrester. I must hurry on to Fenchester, I think; I ought to send a telegram from there to my friends at Dinely. I will wish you good-bye at your own gates.”

Somehow there fell a sudden chill upon them both—the word “good-bye” struck drearily upon their ears.

They reached the gates and he stood still. Nell suddenly put out both her hands to him.

“You—you will not go away without seeing me again?—you will come over on Sunday?” she said with an odd little break in her voice.

He took the hands she reached out to him and held them fast and looked fixedly into her face. Once more it had grown pale with some inward intensity which he did not understand, or which, perhaps, he did not dare to analyze—for there was the same look in her eyes as when she had tried to stop his going back to the train.

“Will Cecil be down for Sunday?” he asked hesitatingly.

“No—he is not coming this week.”

“Then——”

“Oh! why need that make any difference?” she cried impatiently. “Pray come. Is it not natural that you should? You are his greatest friend.”

“It is for that reason,” he said, in so low a whisper that she hardly caught the words. “Do you think I ought to come, Nell?”—her name slipped out almost without his knowledge—“do you wish it so much?” he added a little lamely, seeking man-like to shift the responsibility off his own shoulders on to hers. “If you wish it very much, then I will,” he added, with that inborn weakness which was wont to assail him just when he ought to have been strong.

“Yes—come,” she answered in a whisper, that had something in its gentle softness that was almost a caress.

And perhaps at that moment, as each turned from the other silently and in the darkness, there was no longer any sort of delusion in either of their hearts as to the meaning of it.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. HARTWOOD AGAIN.

IN the dining-room of a shabby house in Upper Warbrook Place, Bloomsbury, a widow lady in spectacles sat stooping over a table that was drawn closely into the old-fashioned bow window. The light of the November morning was pale and

uncertain, and the lady's occupation was elaborately fine, and exceedingly trying to the eyes. She was painting flowers and figures on a curved piece of black satin that was destined to be mounted as a fan.

The design, which to the fashionable West End firm who gave her regular employment, she passed off as her own, was in reality purchased by her for a very few pence from a consumptive lad who lay dying on his bed in a miserable attic at the top of the house; and who for two years past had supplied her regularly with the patterns from which she copied her work.

She was wondering now, as she worked her brush patiently and laboriously, what she should do when Allan Salter died, as he must do, the doctor said, before many months were over.

It was owing to the extreme grace and originality of the designs, even more than to the fineness of the execution, that Messrs. Langworthy and Groves had kept Mrs. Hartwood in regular and well-paid employment for so long. She was in the habit of taking Allan Salter's pictures to the shop every week in order to submit them to the foreman—an educated man of very artistic tastes, who imagined that he had discovered a genius in the fan painter. Once when Allan had been too ill to paint them for her, Mrs. Hartwood had been reduced to taking some old designs of her own: an Italian landscape, surrounded with woolly roses, which she had found very popular with the young ladies to whom at divers times she had given private lessons; also a certain shepherdess, with sheep in the background, a relic of her own pre-marital days. But these lovely creations had been rejected with scorn.

"Not up to your usual form at all this week," had said the artistic gentleman who sat in judgment upon her work, closing up the portfolio and returning it to her promptly. "You must keep better up to the mark than this; these are very wishy-washy and old-fashioned—not at all what we require. Please bring me something more striking and original next week; these things are no use to us at all. You can do much better than that if you try."

And until Allan Salter was well enough to work again, Mrs. Hartwood had not been able to obtain any further orders from that eminent firm of fan-makers.

She could not think what she should do when the consumptive

boy should be dead. She paid him so little—only a shilling for three of his pictures. Even if she were to find any one else who could draw and invent as well, who was there who would not understand the value of such work better than to do them for the money?

The design she was at work upon now, represented a battle between demons and skeletons—the demons were scarlet and the skeletons were white and weirdly grotesque. Mrs. Hartwood disapproved of the subject extremely, she considered it profane and irreligious; but Allan told her that it was a dream he had had, and the artistic foreman had considered it very striking and spirited and especially suitable to the season of Christmas, which was now approaching—a remark which filled the clergyman's widow with secret horror. But necessity knows no prejudices, and, in spite of her objections to the subject, Mrs. Hartwood was filling in her prancing devils and grinning skeletons in body colour with much accuracy and precision of touch.

“If my poor dear John could see me sitting here painting these dreadful creatures he would turn in his grave with horror!” she thought, as she laid down her brush and took off her spectacles for one moment to rest her tired eyes.

“And what am I to do when I can't get the designs any more? Oh, what hard work it is for a poor lady to make her living! A whole fortnight of toil to earn five or six pounds! And what a little way it goes when I have got it! I wish I could see my way to make money more quickly and easily. My back aches and my eyes ache—and how sick and tired I am of painting from morning till night!” At this moment a brougham drew up at the door, and a well-dressed young lady got out of it and ran nimbly up the steps of the house.

“Miss Vincent! I wonder what she wants. I have not seen her for a long time; perhaps she has come to ask me to give her some more lessons; they paid me well, those lessons, two a week at a guinea an hour. Or perhaps she wants to buy some more of Allan Salter's old designs. I let her have the last much too cheap; these rich people are so mean, they always try to beat down those who are poor and to get bargains out of them. Ah, my dear Miss Vincent, this is indeed a pleasure!” as the dirty-faced maid-of-all-work admitted the visitor into the dingy room. “What a long while it is since I have seen you

How is your dear mamma? How kind of you to pay me a visit."

"I was driving by and I thought I must run in and see you for a moment, dear Mrs. Hartwood. I see you are as busy as ever. Oh! what a queer funny picture you are painting now; how wonderfully clever you are to draw these things. And this one—how graceful it is," taking up another design that lay upon the table, "Gold-fish chasing Water Babies;" "it really is charming. Dear Mrs. Hartwood, what talent you have; you must be making your fortune!"

"Alas, no, dear Miss Vincent; I work very hard and I make very little. Talent is of very little use now-a-days. All markets are so overstocked, and the pushing ones take the bread out of the mouths of those who are more retiring and humble. But have you been painting lately, my dear, or have you come to ask me to give you some more lessons?"

"I don't think I can afford any more lessons just at present; but, Oh, dear Mrs. Hartwood, I would so love to buy one or two of your beautiful designs when you have done with them; the last was so much admired. I copied it three or four times on different colours and every one admired it. May I buy this one of the dear little fishes and water sprites? I think it so pretty."

"I am afraid this one would be more money," demurred Mrs. Hartwood. "I am obliged to charge more for those new ones, they have given me a great deal of thought and time; you would not perhaps care to pay so much for them. I am obliged to ask fifteen shillings for each of these designs; it sounds a great deal, I know; but if you knew what they had cost me!"

They had cost her exactly fourpence each. That was all she had given to the poor dying boy upstairs, who had been ordered beef tea and wine and jelly by the doctor, but who often had no money to buy them with, for his sister's small earnings in a seamstress's underground work-rooms was all that both had to depend upon to pay for rent and food and firing. Often and often the poor fellow lay in the cold of his bare and fireless garret coughing his soul out and wasting away for want of the nourishing food and the medicines which the doctor had recommended, whilst in his ignorance he was thankful enough to take the few pence which Mrs. Hartwood paid him for his clever little

sketches, which she gave him plainly to understand she only bought of him out of pure kindness and charity.

"It does not do to pauperise the poor," Mrs. Hartwood used to say to herself as she came downstairs with her bargains in her hand, if ever a qualm of conscience crossed her mind about young Salter's designs; "and after all, a shilling to him is as much as a guinea would be to me. Besides, who would buy them if I did not?"

But she pocketed the fifteen shillings Ida Vincent paid her for the poor boy's little picture quite complacently and contentedly. "I will buy Allan a bunch of grapes out of this money," she said to herself, presumably to tranquillize the remnants of her conscience; "I saw some yesterday at the greengrocer's round the corner, at one-and-ninepence a pound. I suppose they must be Hamburg grapes as they were so cheap, but they looked quite as nice as English hothouse, and poor dear Allan Salter will never know the difference. Half a pound will be quite as many as he can eat, and will please him immensely, no doubt."

Ida Vincent paid for the design and Mrs. Hartwood promised to send it her by post as soon as she had done with it herself.

"Ah, my dear," she remarked, as she snapped up the spring of her purse upon the fifteen shillings, with a deep sigh, "you rich women, lapped in luxury, have no conception what hard and up-hill work it is for a poor lady who has seen better days to support herself in this great rich extravagant city!"

Ida Vincent was standing before the mantelpiece; above it hung a water-colour picture of indifferent merit. It represented Marshlands Church and Vicarage on a very idealized scale, with Fenchester Cathedral spires in the distance.

"Dear Mrs. Hartwood," said Ida, gazing intently upon this work of art, "I have so often longed to ask you about those better days I have heard you mention. Your poor husband was a clergyman, I know—was it there that those happy years you so often allude to were spent? A church, a vicarage house—this must be surely a picture of your old home, Mrs. Hartwood?"

"Yes, that is indeed the place, Miss Vincent, where those blessed years of my life with my lost beloved were spent! Alas, I was perhaps too much wrapped up in earthly happiness in those days, and things of this world, as I need not tell you, my dear,

are not meant to fill our hearts too much—it is through sorrow that we must be purified," added the good lady piously.

"It is a charming spot," continued Ida, who was still looking up with rapt admiration at the spinach greens of the water-colour sketch over her head; "did you not tell me once that your old home was in Fenshire?"

"Yes, it was in Fenshire; Marshlands was the name of the village."

Miss Vincent was silent for a moment, and a wave of dull red flushed across her pale face; her heart began to beat with suppressed excitement.

"I was sure of it!" she thought; "it must be the same place—there cannot be two villages of the name of Marshlands in Fenshire." Then aloud she said quietly, "What a curious coincidence, and how small the world is! Do you know anything, I wonder, about a Miss Forrester who lives in that part of the world?"

Mrs. Hartwood gave a quick upward look and then bent down again over her painting; Ida Vincent was cunning, but she was not at all clever—Mrs. Hartwood was cunning and clever too.

"What does she want to know? why does she want to know anything? and how much will she pay for the information?" were the questions that rushed through the elder woman's mind as she carefully sketched in a scarlet demon balancing himself on his three-pronged spear.

"Forrester?" she repeated thoughtfully; "there were several Miss Forresters, I remember. Yes, I knew them all—they lived in my husband's parish."

Miss Vincent came and sat down beside her and took her hand, so that Mrs. Hartwood was perforce obliged to stop painting.

"Dear Mrs. Hartwood, then I am sure you will be able to relieve the great anxiety my greatest friends are enduring at present. You have heard me speak of my kind friend Mrs. Roscoe, who lives close to us?"

"Oh yes, of course, and of her son, the handsome young barrister. I remember perfectly; you used to tell me all about him when I first gave you lessons three years ago. You told me how clever he was and how attentive to yourself, and you showed me his photograph, my dear Miss Vincent, and you must really forgive me when I tell you that I built up quite a little romance in

my mind about my kind young friend and the good-looking barrister she talked about so much."

"You must forget all that, Mrs. Hartwood, for there is nothing in it at all," said Ida colouring; "Cecil Roscoe is only dear to me as a brother—and it is because I am so fond of him, and of his mother, that I feel so anxious about his happiness just now. He is engaged to one of those Miss Forresters of Marshlands, and I want you to reassure me, dear Mrs. Hartwood, you who must know so well all about the family, for poor Mrs. Roscoe and Mrs. Torrens are suffering so much from the dreadful things they have heard about this girl and her family—they feel so uncomfortable about the engagement, and they would be so thankful if any one who like yourself has known them all intimately would tell them how false these reports are; they would be so glad if you could speak a good word about this girl whom they know so little of."

Mrs. Hartwood withdrew her hand gently from the grasp of her former pupil.

"Which Miss Forrester is it?" she inquired, as she resumed her work.

"It is the youngest, Eleanor, or Nell, as they call her. She is very beautiful—but oh, dear Mrs. Hartwood, do tell me that she is good as well as beautiful; that she is worthy to be our dear Cecil's wife? that is what those who care about him long to know."

Mrs. Hartwood's face was bent over the painted satin, she filled in the outline of a skeleton in silence. All these years she had waited, knowing that she had something to tell, which other people did not know, and which some day it might be of advantage to her to disclose, and in all these years Mrs. Hartwood, it is needless to say, had not grown more charitable or more lenient in her judgments of others, whilst the hard work of a daily struggle for bread had brought out yet another unlovely trait in her character.

There had arisen in her at this time a greed for money which had been unknown to her in her more prosperous days. It is a quality which advancing years is apt to foster in all of us. Other passions fail and fade with years, but that strong devouring longing for money often does but grow and strengthen and intensify, as we ourselves grow older. And it is not only in the rich that this thirst for gold is to be seen, poverty develops it

just as well as wealth ; in fact, there is something about a never ending and sordid struggle for a living which tends most especially to cultivate and to promote its increase.

Yet, Mrs. Hartwood had in some ways a high sense of right and wrong, and was by no means an entirely bad woman. Although, for instance, she took Allan Salter's brain work and turned it to her own advantage, nobody could have said that she was not kind to him. She often went upstairs and sat with him in the afternoon when the light had grown too bad to see to paint, and she would read to him the psalms or the lessons for the day, and would talk to him by the hour about the beauty and duty of patience and resignation to his trials, and she often took him little things, flowers or fruit, when they did not cost her too much, trifles which filled the simple boy's heart with gratitude and affection towards her.

Nor, to do her justice, would Mrs. Hartwood have told a lie or borne false witness against any one on earth. She was perfectly genuine when she made reply in answer to Ida Vincent's question :

"My dear Miss Vincent, I cannot tell you anything that is not true, even to allay your friends' uneasiness, or to lull you into false security about Mr. Roscoe's engagement. You must not not expect me to cry 'peace, when there is no peace.' I hope I know how to do my duty always, and to bear witness to the truth."

And, to do her duty, meant to Mrs. Hartwood in this instance to blacken Nell Forrester's character, and to prevent her from rising out of the mire where she believed her to be lying. Mrs. Hartwood had always, ever since meeting her with Colonel Darley in London, believed Nell to be thoroughly bad, and if the time had now come for her to disclose those terrible things that had come to her knowledge on that occasion, well, God forbid that she should shrink from that which she honestly conceived to be her duty. Only, she was poor and she wanted money badly, and so she was not going to say what she knew unless it was made worth her while. Also, she was clever enough to guess that Ida Vincent did not want her to prophesy smooth things about the girl who had supplanted her in Cecil Roscoe's affections. She divined that Ida, remembering that she had lived in the same parish as the Forresters, had come here to-day on purpose

to find out something about Nell which should, if possible, put a stop to the marriage.

"She is in love with the man, and she would like to part him from Nell Forrester," she thought. "It is natural enough, and in the interests of morality it would be certainly very wrong to let the poor young man walk into such a marriage in ignorance of the true nature of that girl."

"My dear," she said aloud, "I am not an ill-natured woman, and I have no desire to mix myself up with other people's affairs; at the same time there are certain things that came to my knowledge some time ago, which opened my eyes at once and for ever to the true character of the young lady to whom your friend is unfortunately engaged."

"Yes, yes?" and Ida became a little breathless with her excitement, "but they believe, you know, that this girl is better than her sisters?"

"She is no better," replied Mrs. Hartwood severely. "I am sadly afraid that she is in fact worse than her sisters, and they are all bad—all those Forresters; but, my dear Miss Vincent, it would be quite impossible for me to speak of such things to you. A girl, so well brought up as you have been, should be in absolute ignorance of the wicked things that go on, alas, too often in the world. It is only to an older woman, to a married woman, that I could possibly open my lips concerning certain dreadful facts that were once brought under my very eyes."

"You will at least then come with me, dear Mrs. Hartwood, and see my friend's mother? or his aunt?"

"I cannot promise—the fact is, I cannot afford the time; time is money to me, and every moment that I waste means so many shillings out of my pocket."

"There shall be no loss to you, dear Mrs. Hartwood," cried Ida eagerly. "I will see myself that you are not out of pocket, that you are amply repaid. I am rich, you know. I will pay you anything—anything you like to name, if you will only save my poor friend from this designing girl."

And after that Mrs. Hartwood and Miss Vincent began to understand one another thoroughly and entirely.

(To be continued.)

Thackeray's Lord Mohun.

WE do not usually think of Thackeray's novels as historical, yet in some of them there are many interesting and correct portraits of celebrated personages painted against a background that is an equally true representation of the great scenes in which they played their parts and of the period in which they lived.

History, though woven with the thread of imagination, loses none of its truth. The story adapts itself to the historical setting, as ivy climbs a castle wall and twines itself about the turrets and battlements, not destroying the outlines, but lending beauty to the old weather-beaten towers.

Thackeray has made himself so much at home in the eighteenth century, and treats the persons of that time with so much familiarity, and knows even those of little fame so intimately well, that the wayfaring man, though by no means a fool, may easily err by mistaking some of the minor historic portraits for creations of the author's imagination. In "Henry Esmond" we, of course, recognize Marlborough, Addison, Steele, the Duke of Hamilton, the Chevalier de St. George, and other well-known persons as historic characters.

Few readers, however, unless they have made a study of the period, are aware that Lord Mohun, the Earl of Warwick and Holland, Mrs. Bracegirdle, and other characters which appear for a moment upon the scene in "Henry Esmond," played their parts in the real drama of life, and had their entrances and their exits, as well as the great duke or the good Queen Anne.

In following the career of Charles, Lord Mohun, it will be seen that Thackeray has taken many of the events in his lordship's life and woven them into the story, usually changing the actors in those events, or altering the parts so as to introduce some of the fictitious characters of the novel. Such changes in circumstances of little historical importance are permissible, indeed, necessary, in a novel, and are indulged in, even more freely, by Sir Walter Scott.

The chief events which have transmitted Lord Mohun's name to us are his two trials before the Peers for murder, and his duel with the Duke of Hamilton, in which both combatants were killed. It is principally from the "Record of State Trials" * that Thackeray has drawn his picture of Lord Mohun. Outside of this record very little of his biography has been handed down to us, except a few brief references in contemporary letters and newspapers.

We know, however, that the family was old and aristocratic. That my lord† himself was quite a swell in his time is evident enough from the fact that he was a member of the Kit-Cat Club along with a brace of royal dukes and half-a-dozen of their graces of the ordinary kind, including Marlborough, besides other distinguished noblemen and commoners, such as Sir Robert Walpole, Dr. Garth, Sir Richard Steele, Congreve and Addison. Sir Godfrey Kneller was limner of the club, and painted the portraits of the forty-eight members on small canvases 36 by 28 inches—a dimension which is still termed "Kit-Cat size." These portraits, with the exception of Marlborough, are now at Bayfordbury Park, the residence of W. R. Baker, Esq., J.P. Mohun is represented in the flowing periwig and many-buttoned coat of the period, holding a snuff-box in his left hand. That the face is not impressive may be the fault of the artist. There is a strong family likeness between many of Sir Godfrey's portraits—a resemblance which is made more striking by the similarity of wigs and costume.

Thackeray has made Lord Mohun a greater villain than he seems to have been in reality. That he was dissipated there can be no doubt. It is mentioned as a vastly surprising fact that, when on a certain diplomatic mission with Lord Macclesfield,‡ Lord Mohun kept sober the whole time. But if his lordship was fond of drinking and fighting, what man of fashion was not? It was the age of Congreve and Swift, neither of whom was

* "Record of State Trials," edited by Howell.

† He was the son of Charles, 4th Baron Mohun, by Lady Philippa Annesley, daughter of Arthur, Earl of Anglesey.

Lord Mohun married, 1st, Charlotte, daughter of Thomas Mainwaring, by Lady Charlotte Gerard, sister of the Earl of Macclesfield; and 2ndly., Elizabeth, daughter of Sir T. Lawrence and widow of Colonel E. Griffith.

spotless ; the age of Addison, who (according to Walpole) "died of brandy ;" the age of Sir Richard Steele, the "Christian hero," who was always ready to drink and equally willing to fight when drunk.

Fighting and drinking were favourite sources of amusement and occupation among persons of quality. Even the queen is accused of drinking to excess, and the great officers of state had no aspirations for blue ribbons, save those of "garter" blue.

The events which led to Mohun's first trial for murder are incidentally mentioned by Thackeray in "Henry Esmond," in the scene at Drury Lane Theatre on the night of Castlewood's duel. "Between the acts of the play the gentlemen crossed over and conversed freely. There were two of Lord Mohun's party, Captain Macartney in a military habit and a gentleman in a suit of blue velvet and silver, in a fair periwig with a rich fall of Point of Venice lace—my lord the Earl of Warwick and Holland. My lord had a paper of oranges which he ate and offered to the actresses, joking with them ; and Mrs. Bracegirdle, when my Lord Mohun said something rude, turned on him and asked him what he did there and whether he and his friends had come to stab anybody else as they did poor Will Mountford."

It would be unfair to leave Lord Mohun under the shadow of this crime. From the evidence in the trial we learn that the deed was done by Captain Richard Hill, a friend of Lord Mohun and lover of Mrs. Bracegirdle, the reigning toast and favourite actress, at whose shrine Congreve laid his plays and his heart for a season.

As Mrs. Bracegirdle did not look with favour upon the captain's suit, he determined upon the heroic measure of abducting her. Accordingly, one night, he and Lord Mohun with the aid of some soldiers surprised the beauty near Lord Craven's house in Drury Lane as she was walking home with her mother and a Mr. Page. Mohun was waiting in a coach into which Hill and the soldiers endeavoured to force Mrs. Bracegirdle, but fortunately her mother caught her around the waist, while Mr. Page called for help so loudly that several persons rushed to the rescue and prevented the execution of the design.

However, my lord and Captain Hill, with wonderful assurance, insisted upon escorting the actress to her lodgings in Howard street, where they remained walking in the street with drawn

swords, waiting, it appears, for Will Mountford, an actor who lived near by and of whom Captain Hill was jealous, believing him the favoured rival in Mrs. Bracegirdle's affections. The captain had a thirst for wine as well as for revenge, so the gentlemen ordered a couple of bottles from the nearest tavern and drank them in the street.

Presently the watch appeared and demanded: "Gentlemen, why do you walk with your swords drawn?" To which Mohun replied haughtily: "I am a peer of England; touch me if you dare!" and "this ancient and most quiet watchman," discomfited and abashed, shrunk away into the night. The watch had hardly gone when Mountford came down the street on his way home. Mohun advanced to meet him and began to talk with him, evidently trying to bring about some sort of reconciliation or truce of arms between him and Captain Hill; but while they were still in conversation, Hill came up, struck Mountford with his left hand and instantly with his right plunged his sword into Mountford's body. Mountford grasped at the hilt of his own sword, but fell forward mortally wounded, unable to strike a blow.

Hill fled, but Mohun gave himself up, was tried by the Lords in Westminster Hall and acquitted, as it appeared from the evidence that he had endeavoured to pour oil on the troubled waters and would have been specially glad to prevent the deed as he was not only a friend to Hill but to Mountford also.

The duel which led to the second trial of Lord Mohun is the prototype of that in which Lord Castlewood is killed by Mohun in "Henry Esmond." It will be observed in reading this trial that Thackeray has availed himself of nearly all the circumstances of time and place, but that he has changed the parts, introduced new characters and given Lord Mohun a more prominent and less desirable place.

This duel took place on the night of 30th October, 1698, and in it Captain Richard Coote of the Guards was slain. Mohun and five others who had taken part in the affair were tried for murder; but it will be best to describe the particulars of the duel in their proper place in the trial of Lord Mohun.

A state trial before the peers of the realm was a solemn and impressive pageant.

On the morning of the 29th March, 1699, the Lord High Steward of England, Lord Somers, was waited upon at his house

by the judges, attired in their scarlet robes ; the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod carrying the Lord High Steward's white staff of office ; a herald acting in the place of Garter King-at-Arms, who could not attend on account of illness ; and a Sergeant-at-Arms bearing the mace.

The party took their carriages (that of the Lord High Steward having six horses) and drove to Westminster Hall by way of Old Palace Yard, where they alighted and proceeded towards the House of Peers by way of the Painted Chamber.

The peers, in their robes, were already assembled, and, it being about one o'clock, the house adjourned to Westminster Hall, one of the heralds summoning each of the lords by name.

A procession was formed in this manner :—

The Lord High Steward's attendants, two and two,
 The Clerks of the House of Lords,
 Two Clerks of the Crown in the Courts of Chancery and King's Bench,
 The Masters in Chancery, two and two,
 The Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Trevor,
 The Judges and Chief Justices,
 The Peers' Sons, two and two,
 Four Sergeants-at-Arms, with maces, two and two,
 The Yeoman Usher of the House of Peers,
 The Peers (uncovered), two and two, beginning with the youngest barons,
 Four Sergeants-at-Arms, with maces, two and two,
 A Herald and a Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod,
 The Lord High Steward alone, covered.

The procession passed through the Painted Chamber, the Court of Requests and part of the Court of Wards, through a door between the Courts of Chancery and King's Bench into Westminster Hall, where the peers took their seats. The Lord High Steward's attendants stood on the left of the throne, the sons of peers, on the right. Black Rod and the Herald came before the throne, made their obeisance, and then stood by while the Lord High Steward performed the same ceremony. Then his grace, attended by all the Sergeants-at-Arms, together with the Herald and Black Rod, having saluted the peers, repaired to the woosack, where he took his place, the Herald on the right and Black Rod on the left, the eight Sergeants-at-Arms standing on each side a little in the rear.

Then the Clerk of the Crown, standing below at the clerk's table, commanded :

"Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation," and the sergeant shouldering his mace, proclaimed :

"O yes! O yes! O yes! My Lord High Steward, his grace, does strictly charge and command all manner of persons here present to keep silence upon pain of imprisonment.

"O yes! O yes! O yes! All manner of persons who are obliged to give their attendance here this day before his grace, my Lord High Steward of England, let them give their attendance forthwith."

Clerk of the Crown : "Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation again."

Sergeant-at-Arms : "O yes! O yes! O yes! His grace, my Lord High Steward of England, does straightly charge and command all manner of persons here present to be uncovered."

His grace then came down from the woolsack and occupied a chair placed upon an ascent before the upper step of the throne, and the Sergeants-at-Arms unshouldered their maces.

Clerk of the Crown : "Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation again."

Sergeant-at-Arms : "O yes! O yes! O yes! Chief Governor of the Tower of London, bring forth the body of your prisoner, Charles, Lord Mohun, forthwith, upon pain and peril will fall thereon."

Lord Mohun, who had been conveyed up the river in a State barge, was brought to the bar by the Governor, being preceded by the Gentleman Jailor of the Tower bearing the axe.

As he advanced up the house he bowed to the Lord High Steward, and then to the lords on the right and on the left, all of whom returned the salute. His lordship then took his place at the bar, the Gentleman Jailor standing on the right with the axe, the edge turned from the prisoner.

The Lord High Steward addressed a few words to Lord Mohun, and the Clerk of the Crown read the indictment, rehearsing the story of the duel and charging that, "You, the said Lord Mohun, together with the said Richard French, Roger James and George Dockwra, then and there feloniously, wilfully, and of your own malice aforethought, were present, aiding, abetting, comforting, assisting and maintaining the said Edward, Earl of Warwick and Holland, the said Richard Coote in manner and form aforesaid, feloniously, wilfully and of his

malice aforethought to kill and murder ; and so the said Edward, Earl of Warwick and Holland, and you, the said Charles, Lord Mohun, Richard French, Roger James and George Dockwra, the aforesaid Richard Coote, in manner and form aforesaid, feloniously, wilfully, and of your malice aforethought did kill and murder, against the peace of our sovereign lord the King that now is, his crown and dignity. How say you Charles, Lord Mohun : are you guilty of this felony and murder whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty ?”

Lord Mohun : “ Not guilty.”

Clerk of the Crown : “ How will you be tried ?”

Lord Mohun : “ By God and my peers.”

Clerk of the Crown : “ God send your lordship good deliverance. Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation.”

Sergeant-at-Arms : “ O yes ! O yes ! O yes ! All manner of persons that will give evidence on behalf of our sovereign lord the King, against Charles, Lord Mohun, let them come forth and give their evidence, for now he stands at the bar for his deliverance.”

The Attorney-General, Sir Thomas Trevor, opened the case for the king, and then witnesses were examined. It appeared that on Saturday night, 30th October, 1698, there was a small but jolly party of young officers of the Guards and men of fashion assembled at the “ Greyhound,” that fashionable tavern in the Strand, where, as Vanbrough remarks, “ one may have a dish no bigger than a saucer that shall cost him fifty shillings.”

Besides Lord Mohun there were Captain French, Captain George Dockwra, of the Grenadier Guards, Captain Roger James, of the Coldstream Guards,* Captain Richard Coote and the Earl of Warwick and Holland. These last two were firm friends. The captain, having an income quite insufficient for his position in society, dined often at the “ Greyhound,” in the earl’s company, and at the earl’s expense, and had even bought his commission with money advanced by his lordship. This earl is the one we have already met in “ Henry Esmond,” behind the

* The title of captain seems to have been given these gentlemen by courtesy, for the rolls of the Grenadier and Coldstream Guards show that Dockwra had the rank of ensign, and James that of lieutenant at this time. I have been unable to verify the rank of the others.

scenes at Drury Lane Theatre, and he possesses some additional interest for us in that he is the grandson of the first Earl of Holland, from whom Holland House derived its name. He himself was one of the owners of that house, afterwards so celebrated for the wit, beauty and fortunes of its inhabitants during the time it was owned by the Lords Holland of the Fox family. The widow of this Earl of Warwick and Holland afterwards married the celebrated Mr. Joseph Addison.

These lords and gentlemen had gathered together about ten o'clock in the evening and remained until an hour after midnight. What happened during that time was described by Lord Warwick at his own trial before the peers in these words: "For some time he (Captain Coote) and we were very friendly, and in good humour, as we used to be with each other; but then there happened some reflecting expressions from Mr. Coote to Mr. French, who thereupon called for the reckoning, and it being paid we left the upper room, and I proposed to send three bottles of wine to my own lodging and to carry him thither to prevent the quarrel. But while the company stopped to call for a glass of ale at the bar below, Mr. Coote (whose unfortunate humour it was sometimes to be quarrelsome) did again provoke Mr. French to such degree that they there drew their swords, but we then prevented them of doing any mischief."

Warwick does not give us the words which so enraged Captain French, but one of the witnesses testified that after the party had come downstairs Captain Coote said: "I will laugh when I please and frown when I please, damme," and it was then that swords were drawn. Captain Coote and Lords Warwick and Mohun were at the time standing outside the bar and the other three within it. No one was hurt in this preliminary skirmish except Lord Mohun, who was wounded in the hand while trying to separate Coote and French.

Meanwhile, chairs had been called, and Captain Coote went out and got in the first, but Lord Mohun followed him and swore that there should be no quarrel that night, but he would send for the guards and have French and Coote secured. He moreover said he would go and spend the night with Coote, or that Coote should come with him to his lodgings at Westminster. Being thus persuaded, Captain Coote left his chair and came into the tavern, but after a little more conversation they all went out.

again. Coote and Warwick took the first two chairs, and Lord Mohun got into the third, ordering the chairmen to follow the other chairs and take him to his lodgings at Westminster.

"We don't care a farthing for them," said Captain Dockwra, looking after them; "we will fight them at any time." Then he, French and James entered their chairs and followed the others.

The first three chairs had turned into St. Martin's Lane when Mohun, perceiving that they were not going in the direction of Westminster, called to the chairmen to stop, and all the chairs were set down in front of the "Cross Keys" tavern.

"Whither are you going?" asks Lord Mohun of Captain Coote.

"To Leicester Fields," is the reply; and then, as one of the chairmen testified, "my Lord Mohun did beg heartily of Captain Coote to go home and let the business alone till another time; and, indeed, I think I have never heard a man beg more heartily for an alms at a door than he did that they might not go into the Fields then."

At this moment the other three chairs passed up St. Martin's Lane, and Captain Coote insisted upon following them, threatening to run the chairmen through if they did not overtake French's party.

"Well," said Mohun, "if you *will* go, I will go and see it."

All the gentlemen were set down at Leicester Fields, and walked off into the gloom.

It was nearly two o'clock, Sunday morning, and the darkness was so intense that they could see scarcely two sword-lengths before them.

From the conversation among the officers of the guards the next morning, we learn that the combatants fought three on a side—Coote with French, Warwick with James, and Mohun with Dockwra.

It was over in a few minutes. Some of the chairmen had stopped to light their pipes before returning home; suddenly there was a call for chairs from the upper end of the Fields. Upon answering the summons they found French and James supporting the almost lifeless body of Captain Coote. The chair was lowered over the rails and an effort made to put the dying man into it, but it was found impossible.

Captain French was also badly wounded and was carried to:

the house of Mr. Amey, the surgeon in Long Acre, whither Lord Warwick, who was slightly wounded in the hand, was also carried. Dockwra and James followed them later, but neither of them was wounded. After staying an hour or two, these two captains, together with Lord Warwick, repaired to the "Ship and Castle" in Cornhill, where my lord arranged some affairs with his steward before leaving town. Lord Mohun had left Leicester Fields, alone, and gone into hiding to escape the long term of waiting in prison until the assembly of the peers, by whom he wished to be tried.

There was no evidence produced to *prove* that Lord Mohun had taken any part in the affair, except in trying to prevent the quarrel; and although there is little room to doubt that he fought with Dockwra in the duel, no proof could be brought.

After the witnesses had been examined, Lord Mohun rose and said: "My lords, I hope I shall make my defence against this accusation with all the modesty and submission to your lordships which becomes me. I am very much ashamed to be brought before your lordships upon any such account as this again, after having been once before your lordships upon such an account before. I may very well say I am not guilty at all of having any hand in Mr. Coote's death, and I can assure your lordships I will avoid all occasion of giving you any trouble of this nature for the future. I do not doubt but to acquit myself of all guilt in relation to this matter; and, indeed, with submission to your lordships, there has been no evidence given relating to me that does infer any guilt upon me, to prove that I was at the place where the fact was done; therefore I shall only make some few little remarks upon what has been said and leave it all to your lordships' consideration."

He then proceeded to sum up for himself, and after that, the Solicitor-General, Sir John Hawles, summed up for the king; and the peers adjourned to the House of Lords to consider the verdict.

After about two hours' deliberation they again returned to Westminster Hall, taking their places as before, and again the Sergeant-at-Arms made a proclamation for silence.

Then said the Lord High Steward: "Is it your lordships' pleasure to go on now to give your judgment?" and the lords responded as usual: "Ay, Ay."

Lord High Steward: "Then I must pray your lordships to give me time to write down your opinions distinctly, so that I may be able to acquaint you with certainty of the numbers."

Then his grace stood up, and, addressing the youngest baron present, said: "My Lord Bernard, is Charles, Lord Mohun, guilty of the felony and murder whereof he stands indicted, or not guilty?"

Lord Bernard, rising in his place uncovered, laid his right hand upon his heart and said:

"Not guilty, upon my honour."

The same question was put to all the lords severally, and they all responded in the same manner. Finally, the Lord High Steward, placing his hand upon his heart, said:

"My Lord Mohun is not guilty, upon my honour."

Then he sat down and counted the number of peers who had given their judgments.

"My lords, eighty-seven of your lordships are present, and you are all unanimously of opinion that my Lord Mohun is not guilty of the felony and murder whereof he stands indicted."

Again the Sergeant-at-Arms proclaimed silence, and once more Lord Mohun was escorted to the bar by the Gentleman Jailor and the Governor of the Tower. His grace acquainted Lord Mohun of the verdict. Then my lord made his reverence to his peers and said:

"My lords, I do not know which way to express my thankfulness and acknowledgment of your lordships' great honour and justice to me; but I crave leave to assure your lordships that I will endeavour to make it the business of the future part of my life so to behave myself in my conversation in the world as to avoid all things that may bring me under any such circumstances as may expose me to the giving your lordships any trouble of this nature for the future."

And then, bowing again to the lords, he went away from the bar.

After another proclamation of silence the Lord High Steward said:

"My lords, the trial being at an end, there is nothing remains to be done here but the determining of the commission."

Lords: "Ay, ay."

Lord High Steward: "Sir Samuel Astry, let proclamation be

made in order to the dissolving the commission of High Stewardship."

Clerk of the Crown : "Sergeant-at-Arms, make proclamation."

Sergeant-at-Arms : "O yes! O yes! O yes! My Lord High Steward of England, his grace, does straightly charge and command all manner of persons here present, and that have here attended, to depart hence in the peace of God and of our sovereign lord the king; for his grace the Lord High Steward of England intends now to dissolve his commission."

The white staff was now delivered to his grace, and standing up, he took it in both hands and broke it. Then, coming down to the woolsack, he said :

"Is it your lordships' pleasure to adjourn to the House of Lords?"

Lords : "Ay, ay."

Lord High Steward : "This house is adjourned to the House of Lords."

Thus ended the state trial, and Lord Mohun was free.*

His lordship's last duel was the most celebrated. His grace the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun had quarrelled over the property of Lord Gerard, an uncle of their lordships' wives, who were cousins. The quarrel became so fierce that the duke and my lord agreed to meet in Hyde Park early Sunday morning, 15th November, 1712. Colonel Hamilton, of the Foot Guards, was second to his grace, and General Macartney second to Lord Mohun. Such was the rage of the principals that they fell upon each other in a kind of fury, scarcely attempting to parry at all.

Each received several thrusts and both fell mortally wounded.

It was said by the Tories that after the duke had fallen, Macartney came up and stabbed him again. They also asserted that the quarrel over Lord Gerard's property was only a pretext, and that the real reason for the duel was that the duke had just been appointed ambassador to the court of France; and the Whigs, fearing that he would use the advantages of his position

* French, Dockwra and James had already been tried at the Old Bailey and convicted of manslaughter; but having pleaded the Benefit of Clergy, were released after a short imprisonment. The Earl of Warwick had been tried the day before Lord Mohun, and convicted; but upon praying for the Benefit of Peerage, he was immediately set at liberty.

to bring about the restoration of the exiled Stuarts, had hired Mohun to kill him.

The Whigs, on the other hand, were equally loud in their assertions of innocence.

Neither side could prove anything, and every man formed his opinion in accordance with his politics.

The Tories denounced his lordship roundly, for their cause had suffered a severe blow ; and these accusations have done much to prejudice him in the minds of many historians and writers. But party feeling was strong in those days, and due allowance must be made for the bias of judgment caused by hatred of the man who brought about the death of a person of so great importance to *la bonne cause*.

It cannot be denied that Lord Mohun fought, and drank, and indulged in the dissipations of the town, but nearly every one did the same in those days ; and his lordship does not seem to have been worse than his contemporaries, for he is often found attempting the *rôle* of peacemaker, as is shown in both these state trials.

As to his conduct in the quarrel which led to his last duel, we can hardly form a correct opinion. We have only the accusations and counter-accusations of two opposing political parties. We cannot hear his own defence, for he appeared before a tribunal whose records we cannot read.

JAMES GUSTAVUS WHITELEY.

M.P. for Mornington.

CHAPTER I.

THEY were leaning together over the side of the P. and O., watching the faint green line that had been Colombo. Miss Ross had turned away impatiently, and was gazing into the deep.

Mr. Vereker, with a rather feeble attempt at a smile, was evidently trying to be calm.

"I did not quite catch what you said, Miss Ross—will you kindly repeat it?"

"It is hardly worth repeating," she said, without looking up. "I only said I guess Americans have better tempers than the English—as a nation, of course—one can't trust samples."

"I think you are trying to get up a quarrel," he went on, with some emotion.

"Who? I?" raising innocent grey eyes in widest surprise. "Why, I wouldn't quarrel with a Britisher, and an M.P. with the whole of parliament at his back—not for the wide world! When I see people getting cross, I just put a stop to it—so—" with a gesture of her white hands.

"How? Do you find it so easy?"

"How? why, by arbitration."

"And who arbitrates?"

"Oh, I do."

He laughed. "Miss Ross, you are incorrigible."

"No—I am not—only I like fair play, and I can't see you trample on the whole army without a word. They have won my *respect* and *admiration*."

"Fortunate army! but it was the civilians I spoke of."

"Oh, the civilians are beyond me altogether. I don't believe Indian civilians are even human; they are quite perfect! Even Cæsar's wife, in her wildest dreams, never attempted to approach them! If you are going to say anything against an Indian civilian I can have nothing more to do with you."

"And you are sure you are not prejudiced, Miss Ross?"

"Not in the least"—with emphasis. "Did you see that

shark? I wonder why he follows us so persistently. Perhaps he thinks we have a Jonah on board."

"If you mean *me*, I must say, in self defence, that I had nothing to do with the breaking of the shaft."

"No. I cannot go as far as that," she said frankly, "even though you *do* irritate me! Well, it gives us the more time to discuss your theories."

"You laid unpleasant italics on that word."

"I always talk in italics."

"May I say, without irritating you, that I think I deserve some consideration, because I am going out to India simply to prove my theories are facts."

Miss Ross lifted her eyes—beautiful grey eyes with black lashes—and looked at him steadily. Then she laughed.

"I believe every M.P. in the world is cast in one mould," she said. "You are full of prejudices, full of ideas, full of theories, and all the facts have to fit into the spaces between. You have read in some foolish newspaper article, written by some ignorant man, that India is not really very hot, and the mosquitoes tickle you pleasantly in the warm weather, and the overpaid officials live in luxury, and lounge about on long chairs, leaving the native minions to govern India. As to the soldiers—oh, I have no patience to talk about the soldiers," she broke off impetuously. "How you can speak slightly of your beautiful, beautiful army—you a Britisher—when even I, a real patriotic American girl, feel tears in my eyes even when I see them march past, I cannot imagine."

"Well, don't cry over them now, Miss Ross," he said hastily, "and we'll leave them at once. We will only discuss the civilians. They don't make you cry, do they?"

"No," said Miss Ross. "I fancy the military clothes have something to do with it, and the long boots, and the band! Now I come to think of it, I fancy the band affects me most, but I love the whole show. The upright colonels, and the stout majors, and the interesting captains, and the fatigued lieutenants. It must be a lovely thing to be proposed to by the British army."

"You would like the band to accompany the proposal, of course."

"Mr. Vereker," she said gravely, "can you never be serious?"

"I hoped you had forgotten the old discussion," he said. "Is

it to begin all over again? After all, I am not such a brute as you make me out. I am going to give up a whole year to the study of India on the plains. When the heat becomes unbearable—if the heat becomes unbearable”—correcting himself with a faint smile, “I shall go to the hills and write up my notes.”

“Your notes?” echoed Miss Ross, lifting her eyebrows.

“Yes—my notes,” he repeated firmly. “I believe the work in India might be done *as well*, and more economically. I believe that the age of luxury should die a natural death here, as elsewhere. I believe that the climate has many advantages which are not taken into account in the matter of pay, and that this running off to the hills in the early spring—the *early spring*,” he repeated warmly to a pair of innocently raised eyebrows, “is the ruin of commerce in India, as it is the ruin of legislation. India will never be a great country whilst ——”

“Oh, no never,” interrupted Miss Ross, shaking her head sagely. “I am glad you grasp that. Now, you can enjoy this lovely climate, and the *early spring*, and the brain-fever bird and the early and late punkah, and the prayers for the Viceroy, and all the Indian luxuries, and if you are as truthful as you pretend to be, and as unbiassed——”

“I *am* unbiassed——”

“Then, in six months’ time, I shall expect you to arrive humbly in Simla, and say, ‘You were quite right, Miss Ross, it *is* hot, and the Indian civilian is an ideal man!’ I shall be quite contented with that.”

“Ah, will you indeed,” said Mr. Vereker.

“That is to say,” Miss Ross corrected herself with alacrity, “if we ever get to India at all. After all, it depends on the shaft, and that shark has a very persistent look.”

“What an unpleasant idea.”

“I believe,” said Miss Ross, lifting her grey eyes gravely, “one might live in India so long that a cool grave in these green waters would be almost pleasant by contrast.”

“You have a poor opinion of India then?”

“I *have*,” she said emphatically.

CHAPTER II.

THEY were leaning over the side of the vessel again, for the last time. A full moon was shining down on to Miss Ross’s

brown head, and on to another handsome head that was suggestively near her. Perhaps it was the moonlight—perhaps it was the prospect of the coming separation, that gave a touch of picturesque sentiment to the solitary figures. At any rate, there was not much sentiment about Miss Ross's first words.

"I implore you, Mr. Vereker—I beg and implore you not to be wafted about by every bit of gossip in the clubs, or every chance word at the band! Do try and take a calm, and serene, and impartial view of the natives."

"I did not come here to-night to talk about the *natives*," he said gently.

"Never mind what you *intended*," she said, with a slight addition of colour. "You came to talk to me, and nothing interests me just now except the natives. I feel," throwing back her head and gazing into the star-lit heavens, "as if I was really assisting the wheel by giving the fly a shove onwards."

"I don't care particularly about India—to-night," he reiterated.

"Ah, but I do! Now, when you first set up house, every one will tell you unpleasant stories about the servants. They will tell you that the cook strains the soup through his puggaree, and the khitmutghar clothes his family in the dusters, and the bearer drinks the lamp oil, and ——"

"I don't care a—a—bit," he broke out impatiently, "about the bearer, or the cook, or any of them; they may drink anything they like, or wear my clothes, or strain the soup through my dress coat, if only you will listen to me!"

"I will listen if you will talk about the natives," said Miss Ross obstinately. "I have got to unburden my soul. I feel like a kind of prophet."

"Then please prophesy about something else, or let me suggest a suitable subject. Don't prophesy about the natives to-night. I don't care about them."

Miss Ross lifted her arms from the railing and looked him over in the moonlight from head to foot. "Ah, I thought not," she said. "I wanted to make you tell the truth," and, without another word, she walked away to the companion ladder and down to her cabin, and shut herself and her neglected prophecies in for the night.

After she had gone, Mr. Vereker continued to lean over the side of the vessel, looking moodily into the sea. He said some-

thing about the natives—twice over—that it was just as well Miss Ross did not hear, and then he felt calmer.

“Well, I shall not have any other opportunity,” he said at last, “but there is still Simla! or one could write! Oh, no, not to her,” hastily; “she would slip out of anything on paper. Well, there will be a storm to face at home, so, perhaps, it is just as well to pave the way, and, after all, this winter’s work is cut out—and, again, there is Simla.”

He stood tapping the ground with his boot thoughtfully, then he looked at his watch. “Nine, only nine! the longest evening since I came on board.” Then he, too, went downstairs and wrote up some of his notes in the saloon.

CHAPTER III.

THREE months afterwards Mr. Vereker was still of opinion that India was a delightful country. He was thoroughly enjoying the winter—not dashing about from place to place “doing” India by steam and telegraph, but settled down in one station, that considers itself the centre of civilization and the capital of the north-west; and, so, was seeing the pleasantest side of Anglo-Indian life.

The “notes” were in abeyance, but his keen insight and active mind made him an interesting and agreeable companion, and many officials cherished him in their bosoms, unconscious of the opportunity for future gibbeting that they so gave him.

For he was strangely in earnest in this, as in everything that he undertook. He really *did* believe that the life of an Indian civilian was principally a life of pleasure, with a small leaven of work, which was performed in a perfunctory manner at a large expense to the public and the government. He had a belief, born of intense ignorance, that the rains were cool!—that there were five months of winter, and three of rains, leaving only four to be accounted for, out of which, probably, every man got his sixty days’ leave!

“I think I can convince Miss Ross,” he said cheerfully to himself.

It was curious how necessary it seemed that Miss Ross should be convinced, and how much harder it was to instruct her than it would have been to instruct the Government of India, or the English Parliament.

In the meantime, Miss Ross also was enjoying herself extremely, and, every now and then, a chance word in a station letter, or in the list of appearances at a ball, gave him a glimpse of her whereabouts. Once or twice an infatuated young man had come back to the station, raving about the grey eyes, or the brown hair, which he would minutely describe, whilst Mr. Vereker writhed under the infliction, as if he did not know, as well as these others could do, the beautiful droop of the lashes on the pale cheek—the swift upward glance—the soft rings of hair on the white forehead. Once, one man, blundering more than his fellows, added a little to the usual information.

“I happened to mention your name, old fellow, and she said she came out with you. She knew your name. I don't think she had seen much of you on board, had she? I offered to bring a message, and she said, ‘Perhaps you would not remember, or would not expect one,’ or something of that kind; but she is not a girl one could forget, is she?”

“Oh, no!” said Mr. Vereker tamely, and then he slipped away and worried the best part of the night over her half-message, which was no message at all.

At last the winter drew to an end. The careless creepers flung their glory from tree to tree, then paled, and faded, and strewed the ground with red and gold. The gardens brightened up into brief beauty, and some one had heard the first “brain-fever” bird, and some one else's “*dhirzee*” was working at the punkah fringes. Amongst the departures for Simla, Miss Ross's autograph was to be found in the Kalcha books, and Mr. Vereker settled down to his hot weather with admirable cheerfulness.

“And when he *can* go away,” people said, shrugging their shoulders. They did not respect his mania, because they did not believe in it. They said, oracularly, “Wait and see.” And whilst he, too, was pondering over punkah fringes and therman-tidotes, a new idea was suddenly presented to him, for the commissioner, whose wife and children were leaving for Simla, asked him to come and share his bungalow, and Mr. Vereker jumped at the offer.

“If you are determined to stay down,” Colonel Prescott said, “come and cheer me up, and let me show you the reverse of the shield, and, when you have borne enough, I will

take you away into a land of tigers, and we will have a big shoot."

"Borne enough!" Mr. Vereker repudiated the expression, but he settled down very happily into his comfortable quarters, and wrestled no longer with his cook.

Mrs. Prescott was the typical "mem sahib" of more modern India: the lady whose life is sacrificed to her household gods, and whose home is principally on the ocean wave. Eighteen years of separation and independence had saddened her, and dulled her capacity for happiness, but, as far as she had energy to be glad of anything, she was glad to leave Mr. Vereker with her husband.

So he sat between them at dinner, and felt melancholy at sight of the fair face, harassed by its superabundant cares, and hoped that if he ever married But a vision of grey eyes came before him, and interrupted the train of his thought.

"After all," he thought, as he looked at Mrs. Prescott, "India is not quite the paradise for women it is represented at home."

The children were good little pale things, with serious faces and precocious ideas. It seemed as if they wanted to be naughty, but had not the energy, so they relapsed into fretfulness instead. They were rather appalling, and, on the whole, he breathed more freely when their last day came, and they said good-bye to him solemnly.

Mrs. Prescott, looking pale and sad, stood outside the railway carriage close to her husband, but keeping the whole, incapable *ménage* under her eye.

"No, Tommy; you shall have the filtered water presently. Ayah, Tommy sahib is not to drink any more. Keep still, Lucy; that is the window, not the door—you cannot come out that way. Oh, John, the punkah fringes are in the leather box on the verandah. Ram Chand will put them up. He is *six* annas a day—not *eight*, remember. Don't let cook cheat you too much, and treat Mr. Vereker well. And write, darling—please write, and tell me all the news. I shall be so dull. Three long months! Tommy, don't undress yet. Oh! and Lucy's boots. I am so glad I remembered them. They are coming by V.P.P., and you must send them on."

"I will try and remember. Vereker can put it in his notes.

Ah, here is the engine. Jump in, little woman. Be happy; at any rate, be as happy as you can."

"Happy!" The pale lips smiled faintly—years ago they had been sweetly curved, and so pretty. "In heaven, perhaps, where there is no means of locomotion. I don't even want *wings*. That is my idea of peace, Mr. Vereker," still smiling faintly as the train moved on.

The words gave Vereker a new sensation, not suitable for the note-book. He realized that there are some losses for which the most generous salary cannot compensate.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. VEREKER was full of health, and spirits, and energy. Moreover, it was his first hot weather, which goes a long way towards making the heat bearable. Also, he looked forward with a buoyant hope, born of ignorance, to the rains. Having no necessity for occupying himself, he laid out his plans systematically, and really managed to enjoy himself very well. He played polo three times a week, and tennis in the intervals. In the mornings he wrote to the papers on the advantages of the hot weather, and worked up his notes, and in the evening, when he was not driving out, he argued with Colonel Prescott.

The more he saw of him in his own home, the more he appreciated the intelligence, and refinement, and wonderful pluck of his friend, but he could not help deploring his lack of energy. He told him how far better it would be for him if he threw himself heart and soul into projects for reducing his own salary, and making the government of India a less expensive business. "I dare say I bore you," he said feelingly, "but you cannot think how it strikes a man just out from home. You have only to bear the heat for a few months, and look forward to the winter—and the rains."

"I have got into a habit," said Colonel Prescott drily, "of looking forward to the summer—and the rains."

"But why don't you make the best of the pleasures you have?"

"Because, to me, there is absolutely no pleasure during the hot weather—except drink. The rise and fall of nations is nothing to me in comparison with whether my peg is properly iced or not. All the morning I look forward to a melon at lunch, and all the afternoon I look forward to a peg at dinner."

Mr. Vereker looked at him compassionately. "I don't feel that," he said, "and it is all new to me."

"Because it is new to you. To me it is all twenty-one years old."

"Do you never look forward?"

"Not further than my leave. My life is bounded by the 15th of July."

"But you like this station?"

"I like it because it is easy to get away from. No, Vereker, it is no use trying to make me sentimental over India. I work hard, because I get interested when I am brought into actual contact with the natives, and I like camp life; but station life does not suit me, and I loathe the heat. A land of sin and snakes, as the Americans call it."

"Don't think me impertinent," said Mr. Vereker earnestly, "but your pay is high?"

"Not half high enough. Why, the mere changes from station to station take up half your pay, and then the miserable rupee, and the journeys home, and the constant sickness on the plains, and the two establishments if your wife goes to the hills. Oh, no, it does not pay."

Mr. Vereker looked crestfallen for a minute—then he rallied. "Well, we will make a truce," he said; "we will never touch on any subject nearer than the 15th of July."

"Ah," Colonel Prescott lifted his head, "there is life in the thought of freedom and coolness. Why, I live for it, and afterwards I live on the remembrance. You don't know what it is, old fellow, to feel your energy, and your spirits, and your youth burn slowly out in this God-forgotten climate. You may fight against it—you may, to a certain extent, circumvent it—but you cannot escape it. Sooner or later, the ghosts dogging your footsteps close in, and you have to give it up. They call it by different names, but it is all the same in the end. Home and comparative happiness again, or disease and death, and a corner in the dreary churchyard—and, in a month, oblivion."

"That I do not believe," said Mr. Vereker warmly.

Colonel Prescott smiled. "You are as bad as my wife. She says I am a pessimist, and perhaps I am."

From that day the compact was kept, and nothing nearer than the 15th of July was ever discussed, for the prospects of the great "shikar" occupied all their thoughts, and most of their spare

time. Everything was arranged to perfection—stores, guns, ammunition, elephants. No contingency was unprovided for. As far as human foresight could go, there was no fear of failure. And, as the rains grew nearer, even Mr. Vereker owned to himself that it was hard work keeping up a semblance of cheerfulness. The monotony of the long, dull days weighed on his spirits, and he realised, in a small degree, the boundless patience, and dogged perseverance, that come in to the government of India. In a faint, half-ashamed manner, he even began to excuse the exodus to the hills—but he never complained. He had nailed his colours to the mast, and they rested there; but the talks of the great “shikar” grew more interesting, until it seemed at last almost a matter of life and death that there should be no delay.

When the rains broke, he went through all the agonies of prickly heat; otherwise he was perfectly well. But Colonel Prescott had to contend with an old enemy, and suffered from days and nights of fever. He grew pale and emaciated, but he laughed at the idea of sick leave. He always suffered from fever in the rains, and another month would see them out of this.

It was hard work fighting through the daily routine of work, but he was accustomed to it, and he looked forward breathlessly, feverishly, to the day that should set him free.

The 14th was a particularly dull and depressing day, and Colonel Prescott was proportionately languid, but final arrangements had to be made, and packings accomplished, so he bestirred himself vigorously. “This is the worst of the year,” he said sitting on the camel trunk he had just packed, and looking out at the level bank of clouds that were heavy with thundery heat—“regular cholera weather. By-the-bye, the doctors prophesied an epidemic this year, but it seems to have been a false alarm, thank God,” leaning over to buckle another strap. “I don’t mind telling you *now*, old fellow, that cholera would have been the last straw. Only one more afternoon’s work, and then three months of freedom and rest.”

He went his way whistling cheerfully, and the last Mr. Vereker saw of him was his turning back at the gateway with a farewell nod.

It was late in the evening when he came back. He seemed unusually tired, and went straight on to the verandah, where he sat in the long chair, with his head resting on his hand.

"There is a case of cholera amongst my subordinates," he said suddenly; "the poor fellow is dead."

Mr. Vereker looked up startled.

"I am glad you are going," he said kindly. "You don't look fit to cope with cholera on the top of everything else."

"Going?" Colonel Prescott echoed, lifting his head. "Oh, of course, if there is the chance of an epidemic, there is no leave for me."

"No leave!" The other turned and looked at him.

"No leave," and he said it as quietly as if he did not care.

Mr. Vereker rose and paced the verandah hastily.

"Is it in the bond?" he said, pausing in front of the long chair.

"It is an unwritten law," answered the other. "Besides, I couldn't."

Again he dropped his head upon his hand, whilst Mr. Vereker paced the verandah restlessly.

"May I stay, too?"

He stood in the light of the lantern, bending his handsome head towards the still figure in the chair.

Colonel Prescott roused himself with a smile.

"You asked that as graciously as if you were asking for a fortune, but I must give an ungracious reply. 'No!'"

"I do not think I am worthy to ask it except as a favour," said the other, still in that strangely humble tone. "I should like to stay, that is all."

Colonel Prescott rose in silence, and they paced the verandah together.

"No," he said abruptly. "You do not know what it is. I am case-hardened; I have had cholera, and I have nursed so many. It would be too great an anxiety."

"And about—your wife?"

"I have telegraphed to her. She understands."

A vision rose before Mr. Vereker's mind of a pale face, with fair hair touched with grey, and wistful eyes that seemed to be always sad. He shook himself impatiently.

"And about the great shoot?" he said.

"Yes, I have settled that; you can join Thompson's party. He is a good fellow."

"And lastly—yourself?"

"Oh, I have not begun to think about myself; my hands will

be full for the next month. Please don't make a hero of me," he added hurriedly. "It is all in the day's work. Any man would do the same."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Vereker slowly, "that India is the only civilized country in which heroes are possible."

"Rot!" said Colonel Prescott. "So you will be off to-morrow."

"Yes, if you wish it; but not with Thompson. I shall go to Simla."

"To Simla? You have not a wife there."

"No, but I shall go and see yours; and besides—well, there is a girl there," hesitating a little. "*No, nothing of that sort*, on my honour; but I came out on board ship with her. Miss Ross."

"Ah, yes; I know Miss Ross."

"Well, I have something to say to her."

"Ah," again with that suspicion of a smile. "It is a long way to go unless it is something very important."

"It is important. No, you are quite wrong. *It is nothing to do with that*. I only want to tell her India is hot, and, well—to answer another question she asked me about Indian civilians."

"And you could not answer the question for six pies by post?"

"No," plucking up spirit. "I could not, and if you know Miss Ross, as you say, I need not tell you it would be worth while crawling to Simla *on your knees* to answer her least question."

The Captives of Surah Khan.

CHAPTER I.

FAR distant in time and place: the time that of the former Afghan war, the place an outlying fort in the Afghan's land.

Over all that land the hot blast of war had blown, scathing the fruitful orchards of the Cabul valley, where the products of the temperate and torrid zones grow side by side in rich profusion; dyeing the mountain streams with human blood, and choking the mountain passes with the bodies of the slain.

Some months have elapsed since the fatal retreat from Cabul, and the terrible slaughter of the Khyber Pass. Sale's brigade still occupies the fortress of Jellalabad, hourly expecting the reinforcements which do not come. Long have they watched and waited, but to them have come only "the remnants of an army." One man, a surgeon in the service of the Shah, rode in one afternoon on a *yaboo*, or native pony, both man and horse nearly in the last stage of exhaustion; and thus the menace of Akbar Khan has been literally fulfilled, that of all the compact little force which marched out of Cabul with colours flying and bands playing, and all the honours of war, he would leave but one man alive to tell what had become of the rest.

But up the rocky path which led to a native fort, many miles from Jellalabad, there rode one evening a small troop of native cavalry. Their leader, a man of some thirty years, was evidently a person of distinction, for he wore in his steel cap, fastened by a clasp of gold, an egret's plume, the badge of a chief or khan; while the bridle and breastplate of his handsome Tartar steed were adorned with tassels of wild ox-tails, white as the snowy spume which flew from the sharp bit and flecked his sweat-stained chest. The young chieftain, heated with his long ride, had pushed up the sliding bar of his helmet to catch the evening breeze, and his dark, fierce, yet handsome face wore a look of triumph. His foray, whatever its object, had been successful.

The troop of men behind him, wild-looking bearded fellows, mounted on strong little horses, which in spite of their wiriness

showed signs of hard riding, were armed with long lances, the head of more than one gleaming redder than clean steel should have done, even in the strong glow of an Eastern sunset.

In their midst rode on a *yaboo* the fruit of their foray, a prisoner of war, in the person of a young officer of Indian Irregular Horse. The unfortunate prisoner had evidently been subjected to rough treatment. His wrists, tied behind his back, were bleeding from the stricture of the cord; his bare feet, fastened in like fashion beneath the pony's girths, hung wearily down without the support of stirrups. His face, smirched with dust, and blood that had oozed from a cut on the forehead, was downcast, and the hapless captive wore an air of complete dejection, in striking contrast to the brilliant captain in front.

The latter drew rein as they approached the fort, and turning in his saddle summoned to his side his *naick*, or subordinate officer. "Go forward," he said, "and say to the Shereef that Ahmed Khan comes in peace."

The man, saluting, set spurs to his jaded horse, and galloped up the steep path to the gate of the fort, returning with the customary "*Bismillah*," and the polite assurance that the presence of Ahmed Khan was as welcome to its inmates as dew to sun-scorched herbs. In a few minutes they were within its walls.

The fort was of the usual Afghan pattern, a rectangular building of mud and stone standing on a bare hill, with walls some thirty feet high, loop-holed, and flanked at each angle by a semi-circular bastion, the approach being defended by a wide and deep foss, which at this period of the year was quite dry. It was surrounded by an open upland, treeless and barren, the prevailing aspect of the country; its rich orchards and rice-fields being confined to the valleys, which are rendered fruitful by numerous streams. Thus the approach of an enemy could be seen from a long distance; and though the fort might not have stood for ten minutes under the fire of modern artillery, it was tolerably secure against the mode of warfare of the time and country.

Dismounted, not without assistance, for his limbs were stiff with cramp from a ride of fifty miles in so constrained a position, the captive was led at once into the presence of the castellan of the fortress.

In the *sunah-khaneh*, or private apartments, which were placed

for safety in the centre of the fort, the Shereef was found seated on his divan, smoking his chibouk with every appearance of beatified content, and surrounded by several ladies of his harem. These, less strictly secluded in Afghan than in Indian *zenanas*, were diverting themselves with sweetmeats, sherbets, and games of chess, while some of the younger found amusement in alternately petting and teasing a handsome child, a favourite son of the old khan.

On the entrance of the visitors all the ladies veiled save one, to whom the attention of the prisoner was thereby naturally directed. She was of very different type from the rest, being fair and her eyes of blueish grey, in notable contrast to the dark flashing orbs which gazed through the *bourkhas*, or veils, in curious or pitiful interest on the captive of Ahmed Khan's sword and spear. She sat, too, erect on her cushions, instead of reclining in the languorous attitude adopted by her companions. In Western dress she would have been taken for an European: probably, the prisoner thought, a Circassian, many of which race he knew were of fair complexion.

But he was far too anxious as to his own immediate fate to pay much heed to the ladies of the harem, however flattering their obvious interest might have been at a more propitious time. He had but slight knowledge of the Afghan tongue, and though the two khans spoke in measured tones, could make but little of a sustained conversation; but he watched keenly the countenance of the elder chieftain to learn what he could from that. The face of an Oriental autocrat is, however, but an unreliable index to the character, and with Asian still less than with European potentates politeness of speech is no guarantee of a corresponding civility of intention. The visage of the old khan was, moreover, one by no means easy to be read: even a skilled phrenologist might have been at fault. If there was benignity in the calm thoughtful brow, its effect was marred by the expression of the glittering eyes, too closely set, which, with the hawk-like nose, lent a predaceous aspect to the countenance. The lower part of the face, too, lent no assistance, being hidden by a flowing grey beard, which the aged khan had a trick of stroking at frequent intervals with a corrugated hand that for colour and texture might have been of bronze. Venerable or otherwise in character, he was evidently a personage of importance,

and was addressed with considerable deference by the haughty Ahmed.

Had the captive been able to follow their conversation he would have gathered that the younger khan was endeavouring to persuade the elder, whose kinsman he was, to take charge of his prisoner while he was engaged upon another expedition, the latter demurring until certain other obligations previously incurred should have been fulfilled.

"I shall owe you, my father," urged Ahmed, "gratitude and affection deep as the great well in the Bala Hissar, if you will do this for me."

"My son," replied the old khan, "already you owe me something more than affection and gratitude, even the amount of several lacs of rupees."

"My father, I shall pay you with the ransom of this Feringhi dog, whom you will keep safe for me but for one moon."

"But he belongs unto Akbar Khan," objected the elder man.

"Nay, my father," said the younger; "he would have done so had not I delivered him from the escort which was conducting him to the city."

"Then you will have to deliver yourself from the spearmen of Akbar when he cometh to hear of it," Surah rejoined dryly, with a humorous twinkle in his deep-set eyes. He was evidently tickled by the notion of such deliverance, for if Akbar enjoyed the first reputation in the land for avarice and cruelty, that of his young kinsman Ahmed was not far behind it.

"Be it so," assented Ahmed. "I fear no man. Nevertheless, keep the dog, my father, until Akbar hath forgotten his unworthy existence, when I will give thee one-third of the ransom which I shall exact for him from the English queen."

"But how know you that he is a sirdir, for the Feringhi queen may not care to redeem a mere *naick*?" the old khan demanded, being fully conscious that for no *naick* of his own would he have expended in ransom one single rupee.

"Then one-third of the price for which I shall sell him to some chief of Turkestan." And finally Ahmed gained his point, and went his way, leaving his captive in the custody of Surah Khan, Shereef of Khoord Sherghai, within fifty miles of the city of Cabul.

CHAPTER II.

ON quitting the presence of the khans, the young Englishman was conducted across an inner court-yard, and along a stone corridor to a remote part of the fortress. His place of confinement was not a dungeon, but a bare vaulted chamber with a paved floor, fairly clean, and lighted, though somewhat dimly, by narrow slits high up in the massive wall. Here his guards, having supplied him with a pitcher of water and chupatties of flour, left him to his own reflections, which it may be surmised were not of the happiest character. He had arrived, however, at that stage of physical weariness, in which the mind of man becomes callous to its circumstances, and craves only for rest. Too fatigued to eat, he drank thirstily of the water, and with the remainder laved his swollen wrists and ankles. Then he threw himself on a rude palliasse of wool, which was in a corner of the chamber, and soothed by the semi-darkness of his cell, fell at once into a deep and dreamless slumber.

This youth, for he was little more, whom we leave thus for a brief space in the beatitude of unconsciousness, had within the last few months passed through such experiences as might well render him almost reckless of what further miseries fate might have in store. He was one of the victims of that unfortunate policy of the British Government, which took upon itself the dethronement of Dost Mahomed ; and then, having no capable ruler to set up in his place, left its hapless agents to bear the vengeance of that fierce and lawless race, whose boast it was that they could endure bloodshed, terror, and disorder, but never a master.

The regiment of irregular horse to which he belonged had formed part of the cavalry escort of that ill-fated force which, retiring from the Cabul cantonments, had been cut to pieces in the Khyber Pass. Detached on the third day from the main column to clear the surrounding heights of the hill tribesmen, who had harassed with a withering fire the line of march, his troop had found the task so much beyond their compass, that not only had they failed in their endeavours, but had been almost to a man shot down, or taken prisoner ; their captain, with a handful of men, contriving to regain the main body, only to perish

a few days later with the remnant of that fated host in the last stand at Gundamuk.

The cornet, his horse being struck by a heavy jezail ball, was thrown violently to the ground, and before he could disengage himself from his fallen charger, was captured by the Khyberees, who instead of ending his miseries then and there, as happened to many of his comrades, by a stroke of a keen Afghan knife, reserved him for ransom. Haled from village to village, dragged at the stirrup leather from one filthy dungeon to another, mocked, beaten, and starved, the unfortunate young officer had cause every day to regret that the ball which killed his gallant Gulf Arab had not struck himself instead.

Owing to the deposition of Dost Mahomed, who, however sharp a thorn he might have been in the side of the British *raj* in India, knew at least how to keep his own wild tribes in some sort of order, the whole country was now in more than its normal state of anarchy and confusion. The frontier tribes fought tooth and nail for the plunder and prisoners of the ill-fated English force, and the luckless Indian cornet passed from one owner to another, till at length, after a sharp skirmish, in which no opportunity occurred of fighting for his own hand, on this burning summer noon he fell into the hands of Ahmed Zoradah, one of the most valiant and enterprising of the younger Afghan chiefs.

Our young cornet had been reared in a Devonshire parsonage, and had imbibed with his mother's milk the orthodox precepts of his national faith. Otherwise, had he been a Mahomedan, he would surely upon waking from his slumbers have fancied himself in Paradise. For over him leaned the forms of houris; bright eyes gleamed in his lamp-lit cell, and a soft cool hand was laid with gentle touch on his fevered brow.

Fancying it must be a dream, he raised himself on his elbow and gazed bewildered upon his visitants. But it was no dream: beside him stood the fair girl he had seen in the *sunah-khaneh*, who looked upon him with a smile of kindly interest, while over her shoulder there flashed upon him out of a mist of gauze a pair of orbs such as his eyes had never before encountered, orbs dark as night, yet bright as the stars of night, whose radiance was veiled from him again the instant he became conscious of it.

Behind his visitors (women or angels he knew not which, for his brain was yet confused with the turmoil of the day and suddenly

awakened slumber) there stood a slave, bearing in his hands a tray which, at a sign from the veil-less lady, he brought forward. Then to the prisoner's great surprise she addressed him in his own language.

"I have received permission to speak with you, and to bring you refreshment. You must eat and drink, and then tell me who you are, and what fate brings you to this place." And taking the salver in her own hands she served him with dainty viands: an apricot cake wrapped in rice paper, chupatties of flour and honey, sherbet, and light Afghan wine.

When he had drunk and eaten, and his brain was clear, he recounted to her the history of his capture and adventures since the dreadful passage of the Khyber, and in turn she related her own. She also, it appeared, had been in the fatal march, and was one of the hostages surrendered by the English general to the cruel and treacherous Akbar, who, it will be remembered, obtained possession of the women and children unhappily attached to the expedition, on the pretext of affording them protection, representing that the Khyberees, over whom he had, or pretended to have, no control, would otherwise assuredly destroy or capture them.

"I am certain I have seen you before," the cornet said to his new-found compatriot, "though I do not know your name."

"It is Gabrielle Ashworth; and you have probably seen me at the embassy balls. And yours is——?"

"George Seymer, of the Sind Irregular Horse. And who is she?" he whispered, indicating with a glance the possessor of the star-like eyes.

"She is the khan's daughter, and has no business here, having accompanied me without leave. She insisted on coming to see you."

"Just as she would have come to see some rare and curious animal, a new species of antelope from the Terai, or a fresh-caught monkey," he said, with an assumption of offended dignity that was half affected and half real.

"Precisely," assented Gabrielle, with a mischievous light in her blue-grey eyes.

"Can you speak her barbarous language? If so, ask her what she thinks of me."

"I shall no doubt do that presently. I see she is taking you well in behind her *bourkha*. But just now I want to talk to you."

And seated side by side upon the couch—for there was no other seat in the cell—they conversed for nearly an hour upon their perilous situation, and the sad fate of their friends and comrades.

It was inevitable that Seymer should take the greatest interest in the companion of his captivity, and such interest was unlikely to be lessened when he discovered that she was a young lady of considerable personal attractions. Her face, if not consistent with the strictest canons of beauty, was that of a very good-looking and intelligent girl, while her form, clad in Eastern dress, a loose jacket opening over a snowy chemisette, and wide drawers, surmounted by a short skirt, cinctured at the waist by a *cummerbund*, or silken sash, appeared the perfection of grace. She wore no turban or coif, only her fair hair coiled in Grecian fashion upon her head. Except as to dress she was English throughout; and her voice, clear and low, was sweet and refreshing to the captive youth as the murmur of a brook in his native land.

She had not been badly treated, she said, in her captivity. She was lodged in the women's apartments as one of the family, yet was allowed more freedom than they. The old Khan, to whose lot she had fallen as a hostage, treated her with respect and kindness; and but for the terrible uncertainty as to the fate of her friends, and anxiety as to the ultimate disposition of herself (which indeed her very attractiveness rendered dubious), she would have even enjoyed her romantic situation and surroundings.

"I shall be quite a heroine if ever I get back to England, and be able to write a book of my adventures," she said almost gaily; yet as the thought of her possible fate, should her ransom fail, crossed her mind, the poor girl shuddered and shivered as with physical fear.

Then she told him how she had come to India with her sister, who was married to an officer in the 44th, and who would not leave her husband, so they had all come up together, and for a year life had been pleasant in cantonments at Cabul, but now—and when she thought on these things she wept, and Seymer seeing the hot tears well through her fingers and fall drop by drop upon his couch, felt miserable himself, and laid his hand upon her arm soothingly. Then finding she did not stop drew her gently to him, and kissed her out of pure compassion whereat she cried the more, being over-strung and unused to kindness from her own countrymen for such a weary while.

"God, help me!" she said, when she had recovered her voice. "And save me from the fate I dread."

"He will," Seymer answered, and in a flush of youthful chivalry added. "Possibly I have been sent here for that purpose."

Then Gabrielle rose to go, and as in English fashion he essayed to help her with her veil, he whispered something in her ear, whereat she threw back the veil again, and with a pretty blush returned the kiss he had given her.

The young lady of the flashing orbs had remained throughout the interview motionless, absorbed in every detail of it. This detail seemed specially to impress her, for she whispered something which again brought the colour to the cheeks of Miss Ashworth, and elicited the reply that it was an English form of salutation. To this the young lady promptly rejoined:

"I also will exchange salutations with the Feringhi after the English form."

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the sort," Gabrielle exclaimed in alarm, for the slave, who had stood all the while like a statue of black marble, understood every word. "As it is, if you are discovered to have left the women's apartments at night you will be beaten. Come at once, before your absence is noticed." And passing her arm through that of the young Afghan beauty she hurried her from the cell; the iron-barred door of which the slave securely locked, leaving the prisoner once more to dreams and darkness.

CHAPTER III.

IN none of his previous incarcerations had Seymer been treated with such consideration as he received in Surah's custody. That he owed this clemency more to the interest of his fellow prisoner than to any native gentleness of character in the old khan he readily surmised. Gabrielle was allowed to see him daily, and from what she told him, as well as from what he observed for himself, it was evident that the natural charm of her manner had its effect even upon the rugged old Afghan chief. That there might be danger no less than advantage in this he equally perceived, but forbore to give any hint which might recall the crueller perils of her situation, of which, as he knew, she was fully aware.

Youth is elastic and its recuperative power high, so that after a few days of better air and food, no one would have recognized in Ahmed Khan's captive the worn and dilapidated youth who had been helped from the *yaboo's* back in the courtyard of the Khan Surah's fortress.

He was allowed considerable liberty within the fort, though never permitted outside it ; whereas Gabrielle sometimes rode abroad with the old khan, a privilege she greatly enjoyed. It was delightful to canter the beautiful Arab pony upon which they mounted her across the plains, in the cool morning air, or to scale at a foot pace some mountain path from which were obtainable the grandest views she had ever seen ; though one square acre of her native Kentish soil was, she thought, worth all the Afghan land.

The less fortunate Seymer had nevertheless a magnificent prospect from the walls, whereon most of his hours were spent. The fort stood upon an eminence rising from the midst of a wide table land, hemmed in on all sides by mountain ranges, masses of black rock piled heap upon heap, in grotesque and endless confusion. On the one hand through the aperture of a deep gorge, a lovely vignette was afforded of a green and fertile valley, with the walls of distant Cabul and the fortress of the Bala Hissar frowning above them ; while on the other the view was more wildly grand, tier upon tier of mountain rising higher and higher, till in the furthest distance the snowy summit of the Hindoo Koosh pierced the very skies.

Over this vast and wild scene he would gaze sometimes for hours, regarding its rugged beauties with his outward eyes while his thoughts fled far away—back to the moors and glens of his native land, and happy days in the old Devon parsonage with its mullions and dormers smothered in honeysuckle, clematis and climbing roses, the scent of which seemed to come to him across these arid plains. Or, again, to more recent scenes, and his late comrades of the Indian Horse. How he missed them ! What brave lads had bit the dust in that Khyber Valley who but a short while before had been the life and soul of the mess-tent, and with all the zest of youth had raced their ponies across the dusty maidan, or ridden for first spear after the fierce wild hogs of the Deccan ! Now they had all passed out of his life ; it was unlikely he would see one of them more.

While indulging in these sad reveries Seymer was one day surprised by a lady, who came like himself to take the air upon the battlements. Supposing her to be Gabrielle, he turned to meet her, but Gabrielle had ridden out with the khan, and was not yet returned. Instead, Seymer found himself in presence of the young Afghan lady, who had visited his cell on the evening of his arrival, but whom he had not since encountered.

He was not particularly enchanted at seeing her now, fearing lest by a second clandestine visit she might get herself or him into trouble. The lady also appeared embarrassed, for she stood shyly a few paces off, first on one daintily slipped foot and then on the other, while at intervals she coyly peeped at him from her *bourkha*, and again retired within its protecting folds. Seymer was at first moved almost irresistibly to laughter, but when at length she so far overcame her shyness as to throw back her veil entirely, there was no laughter in him; he stood almost spell-bound by her loveliness. She was certainly the most beautiful specimen of womankind he had ever looked upon. Apparently about eighteen (though possibly younger, being of Eastern race), her figure though slight was fully developed and of exquisite shape, the lustre of her limbs glowing through the semi-transparent texture of her dress. Her eyes were splendid; if they had shone bright as a houri's in the lamp-lit cell, their radiance in the glowing sunlight was more wondrous still; the flash and play of them under their long dark fringes would have pierced the heart of an anchorite. Yet there was no gleam of coquetry in them; the clear brown of the iris shone but as with the dew of youth and health. Indeed that she was as much child as woman was apparent in every gesture.

Seymer, as may be imagined, was no anchorite, yet desired with all his heart that this vision of loveliness would depart, or that he might. So far from showing signs of departure, however, the girl, after by a steadfast gaze she had satisfied her first curiosity, advanced timidly and held out for his acceptance sweetmeats, caramels of pistachio nut and burnt almonds. Seymer could no less than accept of these, but was utterly unprepared for her next advance, which was to come close to him and put up her face to be kissed, as she had seen done to Gabrielle, whose form of introduction she was evidently copying in every detail. Overcome with confusion and with a fine blush on his

fair English face, Seymer complied with this sweet suggestion, not without an inward prayer that the jezailchi who kept watch over his movements might not be looking in their direction. His salute was returned warmly, and the introduction might be considered complete, the young lady being evidently impressed with the idea that it had now been accomplished in the most punctilious European fashion.

Being ignorant of each other's language they could not get much further, and thus "gravelled for lack of matter" (or at least any medium of expression) Seymer was apprehensive lest his fair companion might be of the same mind as Rosalind, and deem it a fit occasion for more kissing. Fortunately she seemed content to lean side by side with him upon the parapet, munching sweetmeats and regarding the view.

Presently they saw the khan's little *cortège* defile from a distant gorge, and come riding over the plain towards the fort. Seymer took his companion's hand and led her to an embrasure whence, without being seen themselves, a good view of the approaching party could be obtained.

They had been hawking; and the old khan, riding at the head of his little troop on his splendid chestnut Arab, with his falcon on his wrist, and his caftan and turban of green silk (for he claimed descent from the Prophet) and fine grey beard, made a striking picture; close behind him came Gabrielle, and beside her, escorting her with much gallantry, rode a younger chieftain with a plume in his steel-barred cap. His face was turned towards them as he rode by, and Seymer recognized the proud features of his captor at the same instant as his companion exclaimed in a sharp sibilant whisper, "Ahmed Khan!"

It was like the hiss of a snake, and the extreme virulence of her tone caused Seymer at once to turn and look at her. He was utterly unprepared for the storm of passion which in a moment had swept across her beautiful face, and darkened it as a thunder-cloud from the mountains darkens the vale beneath, while her eyes flashed like the levin which such a cloud emits. Indeed, the girl's whole being seemed charged with electric wrath; her nostrils quivered, her bosom heaved beneath its snowy veil like a troubled sea; she ground her teeth, and fairly stamped with rage. Never had Seymer witnessed such a tropical storm in woman. Before he had time to imagine the cause, she had

flung her veil across her face, waved her hand to him, and was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was Gabrielle who explained the situation to him later in the day, when she came to tell him of Ahmed's arrival, and to confer with him on news he had brought and its import to themselves.

"What could have made her so mad?" Seymer asked; "was she jealous of Ahmed's attention to you? Does she love him?"

"No, you stupid man, she loves you. She was still in a most furious passion when I last saw her, sulking on her cushions. She has beaten her little half-brother, which I do not altogether regret, for he is a spoiled brat and needs chastisement, and has thrown her slippers at two of her step-mothers. She vows that if Ahmed has come to take you away, she will stab him to the heart as he leaves the fort, and I verily believe, unless she is locked up, she will be as good as her word."

"What a young termagant! I wonder if the khan would accept me as a son-in-law?" Seymer said reflectively.

"Possibly. It would be like Lieutenant Smith and Pocahontas. But you belong to the Khan Ahmed, and I doubt if he would forego your ransom."

"He might let that go as a wedding gift to his kinsman's daughter."

And thus with badinage did they beguile the period of suspense, striving to conceal their anxiety under the semblance of gaiety, as brave hearts have done in even direr straits.

For Ahmed had come with weighty news, of the relief of Jellalabad, and the advance of a British force upon Cabul. Such was the case. The treachery of Akbar had relieved the English Government of their obligations in respect of the agreement made by the commander of the retreating force (who did not long survive the disgrace of his partial surrender), and it was now resolved to release the hostages at the point of the bayonet rather than incur the humiliation of purchasing their liberty with gold.

This would have been welcome news to the English captives, but for the fact that the timely arrival of the vigilant Ahmed with the latest information gave the two khans opportunity to dispose of their prisoners. Theoretically Gabrielle belonged to

Akbar, who had allowed his hostages to remain in the custody of the subordinate khans, on the understanding that they should receive a part of the ransom for their trouble. But now Akbar had been defeated, and his choicest troops cut to pieces in a sortie from Jellalabad. He himself had escaped and fled to Cabul, but the bloom of his prestige was gone, and the ordinarily cautious Surah might play his own hand. Seymer was not a hostage, but a captive of Ahmed's, who was therefore regarded as his absolute and rightful owner. It was to confer on the important point, how to dispose of their property to the best advantage in the present crisis, that the two khans sat for hours in the *devan-khaneh*, or audience chamber, drinking strong coffee and smoking incessantly.

Surah conceived that he was far more interested than his relative. Not only was a third part of the ransom of Ahmed's captive due to him, but computing the value of their respective prisoners on the basis of the national tariff, his own was of far superior value. Ahmed admitted this.

"Why not," he urged, "sell them to some Tartar chief? That fair-haired girl is worth a *crore* of rupees. The Tartars are not, it is true, rich in rupees, but any one of them would give you six horses of the purest breed for her; while they will buy my dog for a slave. Intrust her to me, and I will ride at once with them towards the frontier. 'Ere nightfall we shall be beyond reach of these accursed Feringhis."

"I have as many horses as I desire," Surah objected, "and would fain have rupees."

"Even so; but you can sell the horses to the Feringhis. Their *sirdirs* are rich, and heed not what they give for a good nag. Afterwards I will recapture them with my spearmen, and you shall have rupees and horses too. As was the case before, so now not a dog of the Feringhis shall quit our country alive."

This happy suggestion told with Surah Khan. The idea of spoiling the English in this way was as pleasant to him as the thought of slaying them was to Ahmed. But there was another consideration, and a serious one to one who knew Ahmed so well as Surah did.

"How," he said, "can I be sure of receiving my captive's price? You may be robbed in returning" (pretend to be was what Surah had in his mind) "or fall into the hands of Akbar.

Moreover," he continued suspiciously, "you covet the girl yourself, and may be tempted to keep her."

Now this was precisely what Ahmed did intend, hoping to steal some horses from the Tartars wherewith to satisfy Surah. There would probably be some fighting over it which would add zest to the adventure. Fighting was as the breath of life to Ahmed; he was a warrior to the backbone.

He flushed angrily through the rich bronze of his haughty face, but answered quietly—

"It is true, O father, as your wisdom has discerned, that I have a liking for the damsel. Nevertheless I know that she is not for me. The peasant in the Cabul valley grows a luscious peach upon his wall, but it does not grace his own board; he sells it at the bazaar for what it will fetch. So will I sell your fair one, and bring you the price of her beauty's bloom."

"But what gage have I of your good faith? Twice have you failed me in the matter of payment; he who has deceived twice, may do so thrice."

"By the Prophet's beard I will swear to it; or you may send your *naick* in charge of the damsel."

"Nay, but I will go myself," resolved Surah, laying aside his pipe, and preparing to rise from his divan. "We will set out at nightfall."

"Shabash (agreed); there is a moon; we will mount to horse as she mounts the sky."

CHAPTER V.

THE whole of that day Seymer spent upon the battlements in a state of anxious anticipation. Towards evening, when the air was cool and pleasant after the long day's heat, Gabrielle came to him again, this time with the definite intelligence that they were both to be removed that very night. Whither she knew not; she had simply been directed to prepare for a long ride, and had heard incidentally that he was to go too. Seymer sought to reassure her by the suggestion that they would be taken to Cabul for greater security; that the English would storm the city and deliver them from captivity. But Gabrielle was despondent. "We shall never," she said mournfully, "see an English face again." And folding her arms upon the parapet she leaned her head upon them in an attitude of despair, while the last beams of

day gilded her soft hair to a brighter gold, and the sweet breeze fanned her troubled brow.

Seymer regarded her wistfully. Whatever the separation which now seemed imminent might mean to Gabrielle, he felt that to himself it meant hopelessness and chaos of life. He had known her but for a few weeks, yet at his age a shorter time than this suffices for the growth of love. He had fancied himself in love, as boys will do, before leaving England, and since perchance when subjected to the influence of bright eyes and winsome ways on leave at hill stations. But he had never before known a girl like Gabrielle, and the friendly intimacy of their joint captivity had produced the almost inevitable result. It was, as will readily be conceded, a foregone conclusion. Better now it seemed to him, captivity with Gabrielle than freedom without her.

It was not a time for the tentative amenities of ordinary courtship, notwithstanding their seclusion and the sweetness of the evening hour. To intrude on the solemnity of her sorrow with the insistence of his love seemed almost a sacrilege; yet he was not able to forego the opportunity of this, probably their last interview, to ascertain if there was, or under happier circumstances might be, any requital of his affection. With stammering lips and husky voice he faltered out his love on the ramparts of that barbarian fort, as he might have done under the deodars of Simla, or out on some moonlit verandah, with the tremulous tones of a boy's passion covered by the crash of the regimental band, and the racket of the dance behind them.

There was neither coquetry nor diffidence in her response. She heard him throughout without lifting her head; but when he had finished and was waiting with breathless interest, all but love forgotten, she put out her hand to him, and that was all the answer she gave for the moment. But presently she said: "It is of no use to talk of such matters. Love, even life, seems hardly a thing to reckon on. It is death, or servitude worse than death, which apparently lies before us, before me at least; you may be sold into slavery, suffer for some years, and ultimately escape. For me slavery would be a shame and dishonour which I could not survive. Yet I am glad you have told me of your love, for I will not deny it is a comfort to me."

"But say that you return it, Gabrielle, if ever so little," he pleaded.

"I do, I do, you know that I do; but what is the use?" Nevertheless she gave him her hand again, which he covered with kisses.

"Is there no chance of escape?" he exclaimed impetuously, peering over the parapet, and scanning through the gathering dusk every outlook. "I feel but half a man that I do not save you. Our people cannot be far off, if we were once outside these accursed walls."

"We should but fall again into the hands of the Afghans, who are out in force, Ahmed says, to check the advance of the English. This is our only chance," she continued, producing from the folds of her cummerbund something which glistened as she placed it in Seymer's hands.

It was a double-barrelled pistol of English make, strong and well finished. Seymer noticed engraved on the lock-plate the name of a well-known Piccadilly gunsmith. It was long since he had handled such a weapon.

"No one has seen it," she said. "I have kept it hidden for the last emergency. See, here are two cartridges, one for me and one for you, if you chose to die with me."

"One for each of the two Khans rather," he muttered with his teeth close set.

"No, no; it would be of no use, we should but die a more terrible death. George, shall we die together here?" she whispered, drawing closer to him. "We could not bear to be parted now, could we? and the kind God will not be angry with us."

Her lips trembled as she spoke, but Seymer read in her eyes the steadfastness of her spirit. If his courage held good, hers would.

He sickened at the thought. "It must not be," he said. "We need not anticipate Providence, which may yet have a better fate in store for us; we will keep this for the *dernier ressort*," and passing his arm round her protectingly, he held her to him with her head leaning against his shoulder, their hands clasped together on the pistol.

Thus they stood for a long while, their hearts too full for converse, while over them the night began to fall, and the stars came out one by one till the whole dark vault of heaven was set with jewels, and the hour of their fate drew on.

Suddenly, far away to the north, there was a flash, and a trail

of light shot through the darkness, apparently in the direction of Cabul.

"It must have been a meteor," Gabrielle said.

But as they gazed in the same direction another and another followed, and presently were answered from the southward.

"Those are not meteors, but rockets," Seymer exclaimed.

The Afghans did not use them; could the English be so far advanced? A wild thrill of hope shot through him at the thought.

But now the quick strokes of a gong quivering through the fort called the escort to be ready, and steps were heard of one ascending to call the prisoners.

"Take the pistol," Seymer whispered, "and conceal it. They will not search you, but me they may. Now, dear love, farewell, and God be with us."

And with a last hurried embrace they separated to prepare for their midnight ride.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was a picturesque sight as they mounted by torch light in the courtyard of the fort. The lurid glow fell on the bronzed lancers and swarthy *jesailchis*, glinted from the polished arms, and shimmered on the sheeny coats and housings of the beautiful wild-eyed horses, which tossed their full manes and neighed eagerly as they pawed the flags, impatient to be off. Wrapt in a fur-lined *posh-teen*, for the nights are cold in the Afghan highlands even in summer time, over the worn English-made habit in which she had been taken prisoner, Gabrielle was lifted by the gallant Ahmed to her saddle; while the *yaboo* on which Seymer had been brought to the fort was again produced, and on its back he was bound in similar fashion. He was not, however, searched, and in his cummerbund he had contrived to secrete a keen Afghan knife which he had picked up during his captivity.

In a few minutes all was ready. The magnificent chestnut Arab of the elder khan was led forth, and stood proudly before the door of the *sunah-khaneh* in his gorgeous harness—a high-peaked saddle of stamped leather, its pommel and cantle embossed with silver, surmounting a handsomely brodered *numnah*—tassels of wild ox tails, magenta dyed, depending from bridle and breast plate, and a head collar strung with silver bangles which jangled when he tossed his beautiful head.

Gabrielle gave a sigh of relief when she beheld the old khan stalk forth enveloped in his ermine-bordered *poshteen* and wearing *jorabs*, or high boots of brown leather, armed with enormous rowels. She dreaded before all things having to set out alone with Ahmed.

Having surveyed the whole retinue with a keen glance of his hawk-like eyes that noted every detail, the old khan swung himself into the saddle with the activity of a young man. He had been in his time a famous horseman, and when once in the saddle seemed to lose the weight of thirty years. Then when the stirrup cup had been handed round, to the captives first by Surah's command, and to himself last of all, he motioned Ahmed to lead the way, and beckoning Gabrielle to his side, placed himself in the centre of the troop. So with jingling bits and echoing hoof-strokes the little cavalcade filed down the rocky path, and was swallowed up in the darkness.

A tumult of impotent rage swelled in Seymer's breast as he was borne through the night a captive in the train of these insolent barbarians, and about to be sold for a slave to a race more barbarous still. Had he been well mounted and riding free like the rest, he might have enjoyed the journey, notwithstanding its object, for the night wind was cool and fresh after the day's great heat. But that Gabrielle should have seen him bound on his sorry steed with a filthy Afghan at each bridle rein! Ah, what would not he have given for one brief charge with his old troop, his good sword in hand, his gallant Gulf Arab between his knees, to rescue his lady-love from this band of brigands! Yet, had he known the tender pity for him that was in her heart, it would have given him no small comfort in his sorrow.

An hour past midnight a sudden halt was made, the reason of which Seymer, who was in the rear of the troop, did not learn. Soon they were in motion again, but as it seemed in a slightly different direction, and the moon, which was now up, though veiled in fleecy clouds which rendered her light intermittent and uncertain, enabled them to push on at a somewhat quicker rate.

Again, at a moment when the light was almost obscured, there was another halt; something evidently was wrong. Could they have missed their way? It was unlikely with a guide who knew the country so well as Ahmed. Before Seymer had time to con-

jecture there were a couple of shots in front, and then a sound which thrilled to the heart-core of the captives—the sound of a British cheer. The position was clear to Seymer in an instant. The English had advanced more rapidly than Ahmed had conceived to be possible, and his night ride had intersected their line of march. On receiving the enemy's fire, the escort wheeled on the instant. Seymer made a desperate effort to force his pony forward, and shouted loudly for help; but the Afghans caught the *yaboo* by the bridle and pulled him round, while one of them struck his rider a violent blow which caused the blood to flow from his mouth. The next moment the whole cavalcade, with the exception of one man who had fallen, were again under cover of darkness.

The two khans brought their horses together and conversed, Gabrielle reining up beside them. Heavens! Why did not she wheel her horse and gallop forward? If only Seymer could reach her. He shouted to her, but was again smitten on the mouth, while at a sign from Ahmed, one of the men dismounted and held her rein; the chance was gone.

They halted now for half-an-hour. The surprised picket kept up a brisk fire in their direction for a few minutes, expecting a *chupao*, or night attack; but finding no reply was made, they soon ceased and all was again quiet.

The khans were divided in their counsel. They had arrived at a mountain pass which was evidently occupied by the English, but in what force they could not in the darkness discover. No watch fires were visible, and it was probably only a picket that they had stumbled upon. Could they push their way past this, their road would be open, except for hostile clans of their own race, to Turkestan. It was impossible to scale the mountain on horseback; they must either pass here or make for another defile some miles away, which was as likely to be occupied as this. The impetuous Ahmed was for making a dash in the dark and cutting his way through; the more cautious Surah for retiring.

They ordered Seymer to be brought forward, and questioned him in Hindustani as to the dispositions of an English force on the march. He answered with difficulty, for his mouth kept filling with blood.

"I cannot make out what the dog says," exclaimed Ahmed

impatently. "Let the maiden speak for him. What says the son of an unbelieving mother—are there likely to be horsemen?"

"He says not likely," replied Gabrielle, instructed by Seymer, who had every reason for wishing the attack to be made; "only a picket of some dozen or so of foot soldiers."

"And we thirty spearmen, well mounted," exclaimed Ahmed, with all an Oriental's contempt for infantry. "I will slay a dozen of the infidels with my own blade. What says the dog further?"

"He says you should dismount and make the attack on foot, as offering a slighter mark for their bullets than man and horse together."

"Nay, by Allah, he is a fool; or rather he would have us worsted in the encounter. Tell him if he deceives me I will cut his throat from ear to ear." And from the ferocious scowl which accompanied this threat she doubted not he would be as good as his word.

"You have the pistol," Seymer whispered hurriedly, as he was being dragged back to be remounted. "Shoot him as you ride onward; it will be supposed he fell under their fire."

Ahmed Khan, collecting about him some half-dozen of his boldest horsemen, again placed himself at the head of the troop. Seymer was remounted, not again on the *yaboo*, but behind one of the lightest Afghans who rode a powerful horse. In the hurry of the moment they did not tie his feet, and in his previous struggles he had worked one hand loose. He felt he could slip it at any moment, but resolved to bide his time, lest the fact should be discovered. Gabrielle was placed in the centre beside the old khan, and the troop prepared to charge.

It was a moment of breathless interest for the two prisoners. Gabrielle's face blanched with womanly dread at the terror of the moment, but her lips were tightly set and her hand closed firmly on the pistol beneath her cloak.

They proceeded cautiously at a foot pace for some two hundred yards, when their leader suddenly striking spurs into his horse's flanks, broke into a gallop, and with wild cries from the fierce *Kussilbash* troopers, they dashed into the pass just as the first streak of dawn showed itself above the mountain tops.

A blaze of fire met them in flank and front, and again an English cheer mingled with the fierce yells of the Afghans,

several of whom reeled and fell at the first volley. Ahmed, shot between the shoulders, threw up his arms and tumbled headlong under the scuffling hoofs. Then they were among the bayonets, and the poor horses added their screams of agony to the general tumult, as the cruel steel was plunged into their quivering flanks. There was no space for ruth or pity. Wrenching his right hand free with a violent effort Seymer stabbed the Afghan behind whom he rode and rolled with him to the ground. The main body of the troop, despite the fall of their leader, fought like wolves in a trap and got clean away, the whole affair having lasted but a few minutes.

* * * * *

When Seymer, stunned and dazed, for in the *mêlée* he had been severely kicked, stumbled up blinded with blood, he scarce knew where he was. Kindly hands grasped his; a flask was held to his lips and friendly voices clamoured to know how he came to be *dans cette galère*. But he only gazed about him bewilderedly, asking presently for the lady—was she safe?

“The lady! what lady?” and one of the English officers tapped his forehead significantly for the enlightenment of the others.

After another sip at the flask he managed to explain, but they shook their heads. She must have been carried on with the Afghans or be among the slain.

Half stifled with emotion, Seymer staggered with them towards the scene of the late encounter. It was now dawn, and in the pale grey light could be seen five or six bodies lying in the stony track, and among the scanty brushwood beside it, but they were those of men. Ahmed lay stark in the centre of the track with his handsome face upturned, his teeth locked on his lip, the light of life scarce gone from his fierce eyes. The English captain stooped and picked up his steel cap with its egret plume fastened with jewelled clasp, and an ensign drew the gold-hilted dagger from his belt and placed it in his own sash. Handsome trophies these of a hard campaign. But Seymer took nothing. He sat down on a boulder and hid his face in his hands, and recked not that the hot tears which welled from his aching eyes and trickled through his grimy fingers should be seen of men.

She was gone then, gone for ever, to that fate she had so terribly feared. Ahmed was slain ; she was safe from him ; but the avaricious Surah would inevitably sell her to the highest bidder among the Turcoman chiefs. He would never see her again. Yet he must ; he would—he would obtain a horse and follow them up and deliver her, or give himself again into captivity, for of what use was freedom to him, now he had lost his love !

Suddenly he was called by one of the English officers. He rose wearily and went to where they stood by the carcase of one of the horses that had been killed. Seymer recognized it as the Arab pony that had carried Gabrielle. Where then was the rider ? Could the retreating Afghans have found time to remount her and carry her off ?

No, beneath the pony's body, half buried in the brushwood, stunned and bruised she lay, the pallor of death upon her brow, with lips parted, and eyes closed as if in sleep. In a paroxysm of grief, Seymer threw himself beside the body, and covered the inanimate face with passionate kisses.

They pulled him away, saying she might not be dead. And happily it was so. One of them placing his hand beneath the *poshteen* declared he could feel the beating of her heart ; while another snatched the dagger from the young ensign's belt, and held it before her mouth. The bright steel was at once blurred ; it was evident she still breathed.

Overcome with joy Seymer walked away by himself into the scrub, where a veritable Te Deum went up from the depths of his heart.

It was, however, not for several hours that Gabrielle recovered consciousness, and two days elapsed before she could be moved from the hospital tent in which she was presently placed under the care of an army surgeon. She recovered in time to enter Cabul with the victorious troops, and looking out from her *dhooly*, beside which Seymer rode, saw the British flag floating over the great fortress of the *Bala Hisar*. The slaughter of the Khyber Pass was avenged.

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Some years later, when the memory of these events, which caused such a deep and sympathetic interest at the time of their occurrence, has been dimmed by the still more tragic episodes of

the Indian Mutiny, we will take a peep into the interior of an old Kentish manor house. In the hall, which is adorned with arms and Oriental trophies of various kinds, we meet again Gabrielle Seymer and her husband, together with an elderly clergyman, George's father. Gabrielle, though as a matter of course more matronly in appearance, is as fair and winsome in her husband's eyes as when they beheld her first in the fortress of Surah Khan. George, now Major Seymer, has returned lately from India, invalided, having been wounded at the siege of Lucknow. He still wears his left arm in a sling, yet hopes to enjoy his long and well-earned furlough; after which he and Gabrielle will return to India for the few years he has yet to serve for his pension. Their children, of which there are two, will remain with the grand-parents.

Gabrielle has taken from a stand of arms a pistol of old-fashioned make, which she handles thoughtfully.

"Why, Gay!" exclaims her husband, "that is the identical weapon which you carried on the night of our memorable ride in Afghanistan——"

"And with which I shot poor Ahmed Khan. It is sixteen years ago this very night, and the deed has weighed upon my conscience ever since. I shot him in the back, father, in the most cold-blooded way."

"Nay," George interposed, "there was not much cold blood about it. It was a matter of life or death, at least of freedom or slavery. At any rate I am thankful you had the courage to do it. Otherwise, I suspect that determined rascal would have rushed us through, and we should not have been here now. It was the fortune of war, and he richly deserved his fate."

"But, father, he was such a brave and handsome man. It will always be upon my conscience that I killed him."

"My dear," said the old clergyman, "you must not say that. It was, as was once said of a far more lamentable occurrence, 'a cruel necessity.'"

"There, Gay," her husband said, "now that you have received the absolution of the Church, your conscience may be at rest." And gently taking the pistol from her he replaced it in the rack; where, no doubt, it yet hangs, an object of interest and veneration to the little Gabrielles and Georges of a later generation.

Travancore.

PROBABLY few of my readers have heard, or at least know much, of that narrow strip of land called Travancore, or the "Land of Charity," running up from Cape Comorin for some 200 miles along the western coast of India, and divided by the highest summits of the Western Ghauts from British India. Yet this strip is probably more fertile, and from many points of view more worthy of notice, than many other larger places in India, on which whole reams of paper have been spent.

The Rev. H. Mateer (London Missionary Society), for over fifty years a hard-working missionary in India, has written a few books about it, but these, though full of interesting facts regarding the caste customs of the natives, deal with it rather as a field of missionary work than from any other point of view.

Travancore, although under British protection, is ruled by a Maharajah, the succession going through the female branch—that is, the heir to the throne is not a son of the Maharajah, but of his eldest sister. These ranees are always married at an early age to a scion of one of the royal family in Travancore, who after his marriage is a person of great importance, far more so than are the sons of the reigning sovereign, and is called the "Vallia Tumberanee." The Maharajah himself lives in the capital of the country, Trevandrum, which is on the sea coast, about forty miles from Cape Comorin, south of Quilon. Unlike the native nobility of the north, neither he or any of his race have taken any interest in European sports, nor have they imbibed any European ideas, as such princes as Kuch Behar and others have done, and caste prejudices would probably prevent any of them ever going to England. But they have ruled the country for the last century wisely and well. There are several petty rajahs in the kingdom of Travancore, but these never do homage to the Maharajah, and are content to remain quietly at home, with their little ragged retinue of attendants.

The country is worked on similar lines to those pursued in British India, but with more leisure and less of that impetuous

haste so trying to the nerves of those employed by the paramount power. But good work is done, and the police, &c., lose nothing in comparison. The heads of the different departments (chiefly European) are settled in the capital.

The religion is of the Hindoo—most Hindooish. Travancore is called the Land of Charity, from the princely munificence bestowed upon the Brahmins. All the festivals are kept with the greatest strictness, and thousands of Brahmins are fed gratis on these occasions, besides having presents of money given them. Curiously enough, although it is the particular pride of the people from the Maharajah downwards to be the most orthodox Hindoos, yet Christianity probably flourishes more in Travancore than in any other part of India. The northern part is worked by the C. M. S., whilst the Syrian Christians—who claim to be in direct descent from the old Christian Churches—and the Roman Catholics have flourished for centuries, not only undisturbed, but countenanced by the powers that be. What advantage or otherwise accrues from this work is not in the province of this article to discuss. But if little success is made in the conversion of the higher caste, much is done by the establishment of schools and colleges and the spread of education, especially among the poorer classes.

Innumerable temples are scattered broadcast over the land, all under the rule of the high priest, a sort of glorified archbishop, whose word is law, and all these temples, several of which are hidden away a hundred miles in the dense jungle, are kept up by the state. Pilgrims in thousands visit the further ones to offer up worship and small sacrifices to the forest deities. In the secluded parts of the Travancore hills these temples are a very curious feature. They are built of masses of granite so huge in size that it seems impossible that they can have been moved there even by elephants. I have found little deserted shrines in the forest, against which numbers of these huge animals had constantly rubbed themselves, without moving a single pillar or stone. The most sacred of these temples, dedicated to *Tyapen* (the Travancore god of the forest), is called *Choweramallie*, and is situated in the middle of the densest jungle, surrounded by a grove of cocoa-nuts. The way this grove has been planted is somewhat curious. About the 15th of January vast crowds of pilgrims arrive there and spend a week offering *Pooja* to the god

Tyapen. They are bound to take only the barest necessities of life with them and may not stay in villages *en route*, but must camp out on rocks or bare ground. After fifteen visits a man is allowed to plant a young cocoa-nut tree, and every year afterwards that he visits it can plant another. Any one who has been there often enough to do this is a person of the greatest holiness, almost a minor saint. After various ceremonies the twelve or fifteen thousand pilgrims return to their homes, yelling incessantly the word, "*Tyapen*," making the whole place hideous with their cries, and driving every denizen of the forest into its darkest recesses.

The first time I heard it the inimitable verse of Sir Walter Scott's poem came vividly to my mind :

"Far from the tumult fled the roe ;
Close in her covert covered the doe ;
The falcon, from her cairn on high,
Lost in the mist her wondering eye,
Till far beyond her distant ken
The hurricane had swept the glen,
And silence settled, wide and still,
On the lone wood and mighty hill."

The temple itself is built of big blocks of cut stone, and is about 40 feet long and surrounded by a massive wall of roughly-hewed stone, which protects it from the playful attacks of the wild elephants. The interior of the temple is paved with cut stones, and on these are the most wonderful carvings of men and women—rude but picturesque specimens of art many hundred years old. I am bound to say the figures are not over-clothed, even for a native, but the art is not in the least vulgarized by this.

Flanking the temple are cut stone elephants and tigers, about the size respectively of English cows and sheep, which must have been done at great trouble, as every detail is correct. It was amusing to see how a wild elephant had tried his strength in endeavouring to knock down his stone brethren, which having been deeply imbedded at the foot of the great stairs, had resisted the attack with the patience of a stone. Two Brahmin priests keep watch and ward all through the year, and the offerings given are, I believe, simply enormous. This temple is in wonderful preservation and quite a curiosity of Eastern architecture. All over the hills are found barrows, and the most

perfect examples of these stand on a hill which rises abruptly some 800 feet from the Perriar river. They are huge masses of cut granite placed in regular order as to height, and run from 15ft. in height and 8ft. in width (the largest) to 3ft. by 1ft. (the smallest). There are no inscriptions on these rocks and no authentic native traditions about them, but they are supposed to be the burying-place of some old outlawed chief, who made these mountain fastnesses his stronghold, and whenever he could (in those, doubtless to him, good days) levied black-mail on the villages at the foot of the hills on either side.

Some of the festivals have curious origins. On one the Rajah goes with all his native officials to a rock outside the fort and there shoots at a cocoa-nut. This no doubt is a reminiscence of the old hunting *fêtes*, which formerly all native princes enjoyed. Another one is, when food is prepared and set out for the spirits of departed ancestors, and the greatest of all is *Ornum*, the day on which the spirit of the greatest of all Travancore kings is supposed to revisit the earth, in the hope of finding his people happy. So for three whole days Travancore does no work, but feasts and dances that the Great Spirit may not be disappointed.

I have alluded before to the jungle temples, to visit five of which makes a Hindoo sacred—equal almost to a pilgrim from Mecca in the Moslem faith. The following description of one of them conveys very accurately the sort of shrines they are. All are situated on large rivers in the midst of probably as fine sylvan scenery as the world can produce.

Todawella-Perriar, though inferior to *Choweramullie*, in that there is no annual pilgrimage to it, is still the second most sacred temple to *Tyapen*, the forest god, and looking at it from an antiquarian point of view, it is a thousand pities that the Travancore *Sircar* do not take more trouble to protect it from the ravages of the wild elephants. The river here is very beautiful, about 100 yards wide, as it sweeps round the massive steps of the fane, almost washing into the sacred court, and swirling round vast boulders covered with green and red lichens, making them wear the appearance of veritable Brahmins (when men were giants) with all their caste marks on. So curious is this illusion that it is almost impossible to believe without a close inspection that they are works of nature, not of art. In one of the pools at the temple steps, innumerable shoals of fat *mahseer*

and carp are daily fed, and it is a curious sight to see the pool, not 10 yards square, first with a few fish paddling about. A little piece of grain is put in and the pool in a moment becomes alive with fish from one to four or five pounds in weight. Then the lords of the river, great monsters of twenty to forty pounds, come sailing in like great ships, driving the smaller ones from right to left, dashing the waters with their tails, till the whole pool is a black seething mass, the big fish always on the spot from where the grain comes ; a perfect example of the good old rule

“ That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can.”

So tame and secure do these fish feel that they will take the rice greedily from a man's hand when put in, only care must be taken to avoid a nip. But I have often seen a hillman perched on the rocks, forming the outside barrier of the pool, fishing for hours, with absolutely no result, although not 20 feet from the ravening crowd.

Of course, I need hardly say that in the pool itself no one of any nation or creed is allowed to fish.

The temple itself is much dilapidated by the assaults of elephants, and it is only the marvellous strength of the building that has saved it from total destruction. The elephant trench is all filled up, many stones are displaced, and the fine garden planted by General Cullen is a total wreck ; only a few *casuarina* and Australian trees, which have grown to such an extent as to be impervious to harm, remain to tell the tale.

The quotation,

“ Sunk are thy towers, in shapeless ruin all,
“ And the long grass o'ertops the mould'ring wall.”

describes it exactly. It is deeply to be regretted that these old jungle shrines should be allowed to decay and fall away as they do. Travancore in many respects is a very favoured country. From the foot of the hills to the sea it is intersected by huge back waters, formed by the heavy rains from the hills above. This gives abundant opportunity for irrigation, so that a famine is an unknown and impossible thing—and yet only just enough rice is grown for consumption. But every bank and every square yard along the sea coast is crowded with cocoa-nuts, which are

the staple export of the country. The fibre is woven into mats and yarn, the inside into *copra*, whilst thousands of tons of oil are extracted ; the whole of which is exported from the ports of Alleppey and Quilon, giving work and living to a population of over 300 to the square mile, the thickest populated country in the world, along the whole coast line.

Besides this, pepper, ginger and lemon grass oil are exported, and from the uplands the great monopoly of *cardomans* come in such quantities as to command the market, and this is also the case with pepper. On the hills above, which run from Anнимoddo, 8,000 to 9,000 feet, to Cape Comorin, but little above sea-level, runs a broken chain of *cinchona*, tea and coffee estates. These places send produce which is well known and appreciated in the London market, but have failed to bring themselves forward as Ceylon has, simply from want of large firms to advertise them. Probably the financial position of the Travancore estates would compare very favourably with that island. But capital and pushing are needed to the point where it should be, and considering that the yields of tea are quite 30 per cent. better than Ceylon, that there are untold numbers of acres lying untouched by the axe, and that the Government is both ready and willing to advance the enterprise, it seems wonderful that the rush of men with limited capital has not yet been attracted there. A tea estate of 200 acres can be brought into bearing for £3,000, inclusive of everything, and many places carefully worked show a clear margin of £10 to £15 an acre on the year's working. This, if not a sudden gallop to wealth, is a very steady push towards it. There are (and I think this speaks as well as anything) but few cultivated places for sale, but there is no difficulty in getting land suitable for tea, and though, owing to its smallness at present, a young man without capital would have but a poor chance of getting work, it is difficult to imagine a finer outlet for limited capital.

The climate (above 3,000 feet) is perfectly healthy, during several months quite Italian, though trying from the damp during June, July and August. From the hills you get a clear view out to the sea, which probably accounts for the healthy climate, as the sea-breeze blows away all miasma. The scenery is wonderful, miles of grass plateau covered with luxuriant grass, in which any number of cattle can be fed with profit, surrounded and intersected by untold acres of forest. For the last ten years it has

been well known to sportsmen from England, and large bags of bison and deer have been and still are made.

The greatest irrigation work ever undertaken in India, and probably one of the greatest in the world, is being carried out in the hills by the British Government. This is turning a river which flows now into the sea on the western coast, into the dry ground on the east, irrigating considerably over 100,000 acres and turning it from a parched desert into a smiling land of plenty. Some idea of the size of this work may be gathered by the fact that whilst at the dam head across the river the depth will be 160 feet, seven miles back it will still be 100 feet deep. It is no uncommon thing to register six or eight inches of rain in 24 hours during the wet months, and the vastness of the work required to make a dam sufficiently strong is evident. The water is carried through a tunnel bored through the east side of the Western Ghats, nearly a mile in length, flows into the plains below, and then is carried to Madura, some 60 miles off (famous for its old Hindoo temple), where it is distributed to the cultivators. Although the work will probably cost by the time of its completion close on £1,000,000 sterling, and the water will be let out at a moderate rate, yet it is, I believe, certain to give returns of something like 8 per cent. to the Government, besides making the Madura district, which suffered so frightfully in the awful famine of '76 and '77, almost safe from future visitations of that scourge.

The hills are inhabited by several tribes of hillmen, the majority of whom cultivate patches of forest, felling a new bit yearly and deserting it after one crop, a most frightfully wasteful proceeding, which has been of late years stopped to a great extent by the forest officers. There is a small tribe amongst these called *Pandarens*, of whom little is known. I believe that myself and three other Europeans are the only white people who have ever seen them. This tribe inhabits the jungle tracts to the south of the Peermaad planting district, or about the centre of Travancore, and live entirely on the roots they dig up, fish and wild honey. They never cultivate, as the other hill tribes do, are rarely seen by natives, and never by Europeans. There are probably not over a hundred, all counted. But the wonder is that any have survived. Probably during the very wet weather they get lower down towards the plains, and sleep under sheltering rocks and such like protection. If a shooting camp be

made they will desert that part for years. The only time I ever saw them was on a shooting expedition about Christmas time two years ago. We—that is, my two friends, my wife, with her hill pony, and myself—had got to our camping ground long in front of the camp, and whilst waiting heard voices. We sat quite still, and presently along an elephant path a whole family of two men, two women and three children came by. My friend, who knew some of the hill dialects, questioned them, and though they were much frightened, they gave intelligent answers. In appearance they were very like the *Urallis*, the ordinary *Malayalee* hillmen in Travancore, and spoke with less of a patois than these men usually do. Their clothes were but scanty, the children having only a curiously-woven circle of green leaves round their waists; but the women wore cloths like the *Tamil* women do, covering their breasts. They said they knew nothing of how the tribe originated, that formerly they did cultivate, but that fever and small-pox had killed so many of the men off that for twenty years they had not done so. They had a few dried crabs and fish, and some fine white flour wrapped in leaves. They were afraid of the village people, as they said they used to ill-treat them and take away their honey and other little stores. They were not afraid of us, though they had never seen a white man before, but they must have been more alarmed than they appeared, for although we promised them clothes and salt if they would come to the camp next day, they never did so, and in their hurry to get away left behind them a little basket, which evidently belonged to one of the ladies, as it contained a small box with a little looking-glass in it, showing that she was a true daughter of Eve. The flour, which with fish forms their principal article of food, is entirely collected from the head of a species of wild palm, which, when cut down, split open and dried, gives a fine white flour. Each tree will yield five to eight pounds of this flour, but after being thus beheaded it dies. Luckily there are a great many of these trees about, and the *Pandarens* are few. Occasionally they snare an ibex or a monkey, setting lines for them in their runs, monkeys having, as is well known, regular runs along the jungle trees, just as deer have on the hills. The most ridiculous stories have been told about these poor people. I have heard natives say that they would kill any villager if they caught him, and that they are little deformed dwarfs 40 to 45

inches high ; that they wear no clothes at all, and hibernate like bears all through the wet weather. Even Europeans often draw on their imagination when talking of them. I have several times come across their little huts on the banks of the river, a simple lean-to, generally on the very brink of the water, with wild plantain leaves for a roof, and a small hole scooped out in the ground and filled with dry grass as a bed, so they have some idea of comfort—but, as far as that goes, so has the field-mouse. The other hill tribes are much more civilized ; they get the land on a sort of feudal tenure—that is, they have to work for the state, at a nominal rate, when required. There are certainly five different races, only one of which talks *Malayalim*, the language of Travancore, and these keep only along the Perriar river. East of this all the tribes talk *Tamil*, and they say that they came up formerly in times of dearth to snatch a living on the jungle produce, and then settled down there. They are of an independent spirit, and invaluable to the sportsman, being very good trackers of game. They make the most wonderful little house of the bamboo and other giant grasses, which grow in profusion in the wilds, but they will rarely do any other work. About September, when the crops come in, they grow fat, but eat it all up like mice, and by the time the rains begin, in June, are often in a very deplorable state. They then borrow at an exorbitant rate, for the native money-lender can give many points to his European *confrère*, and often a very large proportion of their small crop is taken by these insatiable cormorants for a loan equalling perhaps 10s. English money.

I wonder how many people there are in India who have any idea of the wealth of Travancore in the matter of timber. Sawyers are conservative, and if you put them to saw timber in any hundred acres of untouched forest, will in a brief space declare it is all finished ; that is because they know about ten trees that their ancestors have always sawn, and of which about one-third are rather inferior. As a matter of fact there are probably about fifty kinds in any fair forest that make excellent timber. But I suppose that next to breaking their caste, to make them touch wood that they have not been shown by their fathers to be good trees, is the cruellest thing you can do to them, and nothing will teach them that there are more than these kinds of any use. There are in Travancore some four hundred different trees, and I

do not suppose that any one (not in the Forest Department) knows more than twenty of them. The hillmen are just as ignorant; in fact their knowledge extends only to what they call good honey trees, *i.e.*, those that the bees select for their hive, and these, of course, except those favoured by the big bee, which bites most disagreeably, are only hollow ones. This big bee, called in Ceylon the *Bambara* bee, has, I believe, been captured and taken to Europe, but I never heard if anything came of the experiment.

The wealth of Travancore, as may be gathered from these remarks about the forests, is enormous. Probably nowhere out of Burmah is there such a stock of timber as here, the only, but great, drawback being the difficulty of getting it to the coast, as but few of the rivers (until they get out of the teak districts) are suitable for the floating of big logs. Blackwood, ebony and sandal wood are monopolies, and, with the new *régime* of forestry now started, will probably increase the revenue largely; though probably it would pay far better to do away with the monopoly system altogether, for it is at best but a primitive sort of political economy. Few of the many other useful trees are exported, and tons of good timber decay, without being of use to any one.

Instead of a national debt, Travancore has a national credit of many *crores* of rupees, and every year shows a surplus. Nor are the peasants heavily taxed. In a way, too, stimulus is given to European capital being brought into the country, and such industries as paper-making, cotton mills, and plumbago mining, which is now being undertaken, have been backed up substantially.

There is a standing army of some 2,000 men, all composed of descendants of that race who, by their tactics, were the only ones who defeated the Maharatta Tiger in the raids which he made on all sides, during the last century, nominally in the interests of Mahometanism. This force is officered by Europeans, and now does little else but attend sentry-goes and parades on state occasions.

Near Trevandrum is the military cantonment of the only British force, now reduced to part of a regiment of Madras infantry, but formerly boasting its artillery, horse and foot. Since the beginning of the century, however, there has not been, nor is there likely to be again, any need for suppressive force. The sword has been turned into a reaping-hook, and there can be little

left but a dim tradition of deeds of daring handed down to the present generation.

None the less, in case of an European power attacking India, there is nothing to prevent a gunboat sweeping down, sacking the ports and capital, and getting away again before troops could be put into motion. The chief Conservator of Forests is the only big official in Quilon, and he together with an European firm and a few officers of the regiment make up the whole white population.

Alleppey, the most northerly town of importance, is also the principal shipping port of the state, and is protected by a curious mud bank some three miles long and half a mile wide, which shifts in a most extraordinary way from year to year. Thus, if opposite the shipping pier one year, you may be quite confident it will be four or five miles north or south the next. It rarely goes more than eight miles either way, but is never stationary. No expert has ever yet been able to give the *raison d'être* of its existence, though numberless theories have been started. One thing is quite certain, the mud contains a large proportion of oily matter, for in the monsoon, with the sea outside running mountains high, ships can anchor on the bank of mud and take in cargo with impunity.

South of Alleppey are the curious little scraps of British territory called Anjengo and Tangaucherry. They are a very sore spot to the Travancoreans, for were they not British, the duty on tobacco and other contraband articles would increase greatly. When arranging for the land on which the great Perriar irrigation work is placed, Travancore asked for the two places in exchange, and the British Government would not have objected, but that the inhabitants to a man petitioned against their being removed from the benign rule of Her Gracious Majesty the Queen Empress. No wonder these gentry like it; the places being too small for a preventative force to be kept, they can ply their little games undisturbed.

The Maharajah and princes live principally in the fort at Travandrum, which, however, has nothing in the way of architecture to distinguish it. And even the old massive walls are disfigured by embellishments of the latest style of Cockney architecture. I was horrified to see that one of the old gateways, which at any rate had the merit of simplicity and was in keeping with the rest,

had been pulled down, and a monstrous thing of red brick with an arch faced with white stone or lime erected in its place, very much what you would see at the entrance to "Laurel Grove," or "Orange Blossom" Cottage at 'Ampstead 'Eath. And this takes away much of the mysterious glamour which should surround the home of Oriental potentates.

There is a fine museum here, which is well filled with specimens of the trees, grasses, jungle products, snakes and insects of Travancore. Many entirely new specimens of every kind have been found and classified by those connected with it, whilst the Maharajah has been liberal with funds in the aid of science. The state is enormously wealthy, and besides all its invested money, there is supposed to be in the fort a huge well, lined and filled with all sorts of precious stones and metals. This is secured by an iron door with seven locks, and seven officers of state each hold a key, nor can the monster safe be unlocked unless the seven keys are used at the same time. This reads like an Arabian night's story, but is, I believe, really authentic. However, it has never been my good fortune, much as I have wished it, to see the classic spot. There seems good reason to think that it would be hopeless to find gold enough to keep up a gold currency in India, so wonderful is the way that metal is absorbed by the natives. On a *fête* day I have often seen hundreds, I may say thousands, of women and girls, walking about with necklaces made entirely of gold coins from the time of the first Dutch and Portuguese settlement, down to our present English sovereign, strung at haphazard together, and forming a circlet often six inches in depth. True, many of these are valuable, and are handed down from generation to generation, witness the antiquity of many of the coins. But still the population increases enormously, and not one of the weaker sex of the better class can move out on festal days without nearly a queen's ransom on her neck.

The actual coin of the country is curious. Besides special ones struck on great occasions, such as the succession of a new Maharajah to the throne, or something of the kind, there is the *chuckran*, a little flat coin with Chinese-like hieroglyphics in silver or gold, the former worth about a halfpenny and the latter about a shilling. These are little bits of metal about the circumference of a pin. Then there is the *firnam*, about the size of a threepenny-bit, worth twopence, and the *cash*, a copper coin about the size

of the *chuckran* and worth the sixteenth part of one. All these coins are made in the mint by a man who, with a heavy hammer with these hieroglyphics on it, strikes the coin while in a soft state. The result is that it is impossible to get two stamped alike. The whole of the state accounts are kept in *firmams*, that being the registered coin of the country, corresponding to our sovereign as a standard. I regret to say that rupees and half rupees have been introduced lately, but these are a snare and delusion, and not worthy of the old coins of Travancore.

This article has, I think, shown that there is still in India a corner left, which has kept up some of the remembrances of former times, and is still worthy the attention of visitors in search of the quaint and interesting, as well as of those who are anxious to invest capital.

The only other articles I have read on this interesting state have been written solely from a sportsman's point of view, which, good though it may be in moderation, can scarcely be called the *summum bonum* of life. Indeed, with the yearly increasing number of sportsmen and would-be sportsmen, and the reckless massacre of females and young, which one hears of only too often, unless game laws and close seasons can be shortly started, the wild inhabitants of these splendid shooting grounds will become like the American bison—a thing of the past.

S. M. D.

A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

"IT WILL KILL HER!"

"It will kill my mother. For myself, I could bear it; but if there is any truth in the ghastly story, it will kill my poor mother."

"Not so bad as that, I hope, Mr. Stanmer, for I very much fear that the ghastly story is true."

"What has induced the woman to keep quiet all these years?"

"It's difficult to say why she has done so. There's a screw loose in her antecedents, I imagine. Smith, the solicitor who has been making inquiries about the Arthur Ogilvie who we presume to have been your father, merely baldly stated that Mrs. Ogilvie had left her husband when her son was a baby, taking that baby with her. I asked '*why* she had left her husband,' and he told me 'that point was immaterial to the case.' He said he could prove the marriage, and said there had never been a divorce."

Arthur Stanmer shuddered.

"If the story is true, my poor mother is not my father's wife," he said bitterly. "And she always believed him to be the soul of honour."

He must have married her under the impression that his first wife was dead."

"She is still alive?"

"She is, and the son also. Smith says he has been a bit of a scapegrace, but is settling down quietly now. He has been an actor, but now he is a traveller for a wine merchants' firm."

"Good heaven! I know him, then," Arthur broke in. "Does he know yet who his father was?"

"No, Smith has not enlightened his clients yet; the mother knows that he has got a clue to her late husband's identity, but Smith is waiting to see you before he puts the power of full knowledge and information in their hands. He and I both hope that an arrangement may be come to quietly by which your mother may be spared the blow of hearing the truth."

"That will be impossible, utterly impossible. If this Mr. Ogilvie is my father's eldest son, born in wedlock, I am a bastard and a pauper. My mother must know the truth, all the world will know it; she is one of the proudest, as well as one of the purest women that ever lived. It will kill her."

"Upon my word, I feel disposed to attempt to negotiate for secrecy," the lawyer exclaimed; "the young fellow has never been led to expect either money or property. Something might be done possibly to effect a compromise."

"Is it likely that either the wife or the son will give up their rights? Moreover, I wouldn't lend myself to any deception. Tell Mr. Smith that he is at liberty to put his clients in full possession of the facts of the case without delay. The crash must come, and as it's inevitable, the sooner it comes the better. Thank God, I have not brought any one into the disgrace which will attach to me when the hideous truth is made public. Thank God, no loving woman will have to blush for me and herself through any action of mine."

"My dear fellow, you take a distorted and exaggerated view of things." The lawyer spoke feelingly, he had been the friend as well as the legal adviser of Arthur's father, and the bitterness of spirit which possessed the young man now hurt the old man on that dead friend's account.

"I can't well exaggerate the shame and misery and poverty that will be the portion of my mother and myself for the future. I know what you're thinking; you think I am censuring my father's memory. Remember, before you blame me for doing so, that I am my mother's son also. Think of the blot this will be on her good name and fame."

"Every one will understand that Mrs. Stanmer is absolutely innocent, absolutely without reproach."

"I know she is all that," Arthur cried hotly; "but how will

that help her? She will be subject to the thousand and one nameless slights that are always freely offered to those who have to step down from the top of the social ladder to its lowest rung. And the woman who will take her place and reign at Dene Prior as the widow of the late Arthur Stanmer will be sympathized with as one who has too long been defrauded of her due. My poor mother! It will kill her!"

"She has more grit than you give her credit for. I don't believe she will bow her stately head for a moment; she will be as much honoured as ever, and perhaps better loved for this undeserved trouble which has fallen upon her."

"I shall take her away at once; no one shall gloat over our downfall. Good heavens! I am forgetting my position already. I have not the means of taking her away."

"Your mother's own money is strictly settled upon her."

"What does that amount to? A beggarly four hundred a year; just enough to keep her in that sort of genteel poverty which she might have had the courage to battle through when she was younger, but which will speedily wear her out now. As for myself, I have my arms and legs, and failing all else I can break stones on the road, I suppose."

"I thought he would have borne it better; I hoped he would have shown a brave front," the lawyer thought pitifully. "It's a bad blow, a very bad blow, poor fellow; but he's hand-free and heart-free, luckily, and with his good looks and address he may marry money if he isn't too infernally proud."

Arthur Stanmer had been lingering on day after day in town, hoping against hope as the hours went by that this claim which was being set up for a Mrs. Ogilvie and her son might turn out to be a fraudulent one. This hope was over now. His lawyers had been convinced against their will that when his father had gone through the marriage ceremony with his mother, a first legal wife had been in existence—was in existence still, worse luck. And worse luck still, there was an elder brother, a rightful heir, living.

It was useless staying in town any longer, but it was an awful alternative to have to go home and break the appalling news to his mother. How could he do it? How could he bear to do it and live? the poor young fellow asked himself a hundred times as he made his miserable preparations to go back to the home

which he had left with such high hopes of happiness and Belle. He was at such a low ebb that he felt mournfully glad that he had not answered that kind letter of hers which his mother had forwarded to him from Dene Prior. On the very day he had received it, and just as he had been on the point of starting off for Blessington Terrace to plead his cause—which he felt intuitively was already more than half won—the first note of alarm as to his legitimate right to the name of Stanmer and the Dene Prior property had been sounded. He had then determined to wait before he either wrote to or saw Belle; to wait until all disgraceful doubts should be cleared up. When he thought that the fuller knowledge for which he had waited was *this*, that he was a “bastard and a pauper,” as he called himself unmercifully, he nearly went mad.

Once or twice he nearly relented towards himself, nearly made up his mind to go to Belle and tell her all the grim facts of the case. Then after each relapse into this relenting mood he became more inflexible than before. He would not stoop to ask for the love and pity of a girl whom he had condemned unjustly, he felt now. Whatever she did, whether she smiled upon him or frowned upon him, her action would be equally galling to him in his present raw and smarting frame of mind.

A fierce wave of jealousy swept over his soul when he remembered how the handsome vagabond who now turned out to be his brother had stolen kisses from Belle's lips, which he (Arthur) had always held sacred. Supposing that through the irony of fate Belle should ever—but, no, he wouldn't allow himself to suppose anything so revolting! Then immediately he relaxed, and “allowed” himself to think, “Supposing he offers himself to Belle now, and she, dazzled by the position he can give her, accepts him? He will steal everything from me—my inheritance, my name, my honour, and my love!”

He had his better moods at times, and while they lasted he would nearly allow his impulses to take him to Belle Warrener. But before he obeyed this better and broader impulse the narrower suspicion that Belle would not care for a man “who had not even a name to offer her” stepped in, and he succumbed to the temptation of believing that she would despise and reject him.

“Let there be no delay about it. The crash must come; let

it come at once. Tell those people that my mother and I will leave Dene Prior within a week," he said to his solicitor before going home, and the man of business replied :

"You are right not to procrastinate and delay matters ; it would do no good. But you had better try to establish friendly relations with this man, who, after all, is your brother. Don't treat him as an enemy before you know that he means to be one to you. It is not his fault, remember, that he is your father's eldest son."

"I knocked him down some time ago, when he was masquerading as a beggar, and I caught him insulting a lady I know. He won't forgive me that in a hurry. What is the mother like? Good heavens! it's maddening to think of her in my mother's place."

"I believe she is a very respectable old lady now, whatever she may have been when she left her home and her husband. They know nothing yet, remember. Smith is giving you time to break it to your mother before he acquaints them with their rise in life."

"The loss of my belief in my father's honour and integrity is worse to me than the loss of Dene Prior."

"Don't lose that belief yet. It will probably turn out that he married your mother under the impression that the first wife was dead."

"We can arrive at what his impression was now. It seems to me that he would not have kept the matter so dark if he really knew she was dead, or if it really was a marriage."

"I am afraid there is no doubt as to the marriage."

"It will kill my mother," poor Arthur said hopelessly, and there being nothing reassuring to say on this point, the man of business said nothing.

Meanwhile Belle wearied for an answer to her letter of explanation, which never came.

She did not give way to the soul-sickening and lowering yearning to see the beloved object in which Sylvia was indulging freely at the time. Belle struggled to keep her love (it was not infatuation) in check, as it did not appear that Arthur reciprocated it sufficiently to trust and believe her. At the same time she could not help thinking of him a great deal too much for her own comfort. She pictured him down at Dene Prior giving fond looks

and words to the distinguished-looking girl whom she had seen for a minute or two on the platform, and who she knew from her step-mother was still a guest at Dene Prior. She admitted honestly that this girl, this Rose Davenport, had beauty and breeding, and that any man might be forgiven for succumbing to her charms. At the same time she felt bitterly hurt and disappointed that Arthur should have done so, and the thought of going back to Prior Common and being a compulsory witness of their happiness was sadly distasteful to her.

The opportunity which Lily wanted of prettily pleading Sylvia's desire for the wedding to be delayed with Mr. Christopher was not long in coming.

She was at home alone one afternoon when he called. The wedding day was fixed for that day week, and he was not unnaturally ill-pleased that his bride-elect was not at home to receive him, as he had prepared her for his coming some hours before by a note and a posy of orchids, tied with the palest heliotrope ribbon streamers.

However, his ill-temper abated a little when Lily, looking her fairest, rose to receive him.

"Mamma and Sylvia and Belle are enterprising, and have gone out on a round of calls. I am lazy, and stayed at home—to see you."

Lily was feeling intensely well satisfied with herself this afternoon. Her black bengaline skirt was admirably cut, and the pale heliotrope silk shirt, with its cross-over folds, was a distinct success. The orchids, with their streamers, that just matched her shirt, stood in a silver vase on a little table by her side.

"I dressed up to them, you see," she said, touching a petal lightly with her finger. "It was such an opportunity, and as Sylvia didn't want to take it I thought you wouldn't be angry with me for peacocking myself with her flowers until she comes in."

"Angry—with *you*. A man must be ill-conditioned indeed who could be angry with *you*. But I must say"—he plumped down ponderously into a very well carved but shaky Belgian chair as he spoke, and she could not help smiling at the thought of how funny he would look if the seat collapsed, and his body went down, while his head and feet remained in the air—"I must

say that I am getting a little tired of Sylvia's forgetfulness. Want of memory in a young person is a grievous fault. I told her in a note, which I presume she received this morning with the orchids, that I should call at four o'clock. It is now four exactly, and I find *she* has gone out. Sylvia's forgetfulness or indifference, whichever it is, annoys me."

He looked steadily at Lily, and Lily withdrew her fond gaze from the contemplation of her own remarkably pretty, well hosed and shoed feet, and looked steadily at him as she answered :

"Sylvia went out on purpose. She wants to 'get used to the thought of being Mrs. Christopher,' she says, quietly and gradually. Seeing you upsets her, she says. She would get used to the idea of being married much better if she didn't see you for six months—so she tells mamma and me. I think I should prefer the other plan of getting used to the idea, and that is seeing you constantly. But Sylvia and I are very different."

He was bursting with rage and mortification as he listened to her. But it was not her fault that he was being thrust into this odious position. Distinctly it was not her fault. She was a thousand times more womanly, gentler and sweeter than Sylvia.

CHAPTER XV.

SYLVIA'S SACRIFICE.

"SYLVIA must clearly understand, once for all, that I am not going to submit to her absurd—her insultingly absurd condition. I should be the laughing-stock of all my friends. Unless she is ready and willing to behave like a reasonable woman, and marry me, as arranged, this day week, the wedding shall be put off for ever."

"She is very foolish to lose such a chance ; any other girl would prize it too highly to risk losing it for a mere silly fad," Lily answered, with just the right touch of sympathy. It did not express pity for him. To pity he would have strongly objected. He, a rich, well-reputed, thoroughly honourable and respectable citizen and gentleman, was undoubtedly no object of pity. At the same time, it was very soothing to be told by such a fair and sweet young woman as Lily, that any other girl than her less lovely sister would prize the chance of marrying him too highly to risk losing it.

"Tell me more about your house in Devonshire," she said presently; "I don't suppose I shall ever see it now, but I like hearing about it."

"Why should you suppose you will never see it?"

"Why? If Sylvia sticks to her condition and you stick to yours, I suppose you will never care to speak to any of us again. Poor mamma and I will be the sufferers."

She spoke of the possible suffering which might be in store with smiling affability. He told himself, "upon his solemn honour, that he had never met with a sweeter-tempered woman in his life." Aloud he said:

"You may rest assured that, however unreasonable Sylvia is, I shall not visit her offences on you. I shall not desert you, Lily, though you don't seem destined to be my sister." Then he went on to tell, in the most vivid language he had at command, of the beauties and spaciousness of his house and gardens in the middle of Devonshire. But diffuse as he was, Lily failed to gather any very clear idea of it from his description. However, he liked to talk about it, so she listened with many appreciative smiles, while he rambled on in happy forgetfulness of his grievance against his capricious Sylvia.

He remembered this, though, when, after a time, Mrs. Gould and Belle Warrener came home without Sylvia. The latter had rebelled against going home to meet her liege lover, and had very openly declared her intention of going off to see old Mrs. Ogilvie, to the infinite distress of her mother. Mrs. Gould refrained from making him acquainted with this crowning piece of evil-doing, but that Sylvia should not have come home, though there was a chance of finding him there, offended him sufficiently.

"My time is of too much importance to be wasted in waiting about to see a young lady who seems to be ignorant of the merest rudiments of politeness," he said, bringing his air of heaviest displeasure to bear on Mrs. Gould, who was guileless in the matter. "I meant to have asked you all to dine with me at the 'Métropole,' and have already secured a box for 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,' but as Sylvia has behaved in this unaccountably disagreeable way, the box will be wasted."

"Sylvia is more than irritating," Mrs. Gould murmured apologetically; "I can't tell you how much I feel ashamed of her conduct."

"You may well be—you may well be," he replied loftily, and for a moment or two Mrs. Gould gave way to natural feeling, hated him, and understood poor Sylvia's repugnance to him. Then she exorcised the demon of natural feeling, as conventional, ambitious and poverty-stricken mothers are compelled to do continually, remembered his well-to-do condition and Dick Ogilvie's impetuosity, and accepted the unjust rebuke meekly.

He said good-bye to them soon after this, and when he was gone, Lily resumed her reading of one of Rudyard Kipling's stories of harmoniously happy and perfectly pure married life.

"You might as well tell me what he said before we came in," Mrs. Gould said fretfully. "You are so apathetic, Lily. The well-being of the whole family is at stake, and you don't even take the trouble to tell me how Mr. Christopher bore it."

"He said that unless the wedding comes off this day week, as arranged, he won't marry her at all," Lily said sweetly.

"Lily! did you try to move him to a less stern determination? You apparently don't realize what it means. If she marries him you and I can go abroad for a time, let this house and retrench, and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that the expenses I've incurred this summer for her *trousseau* and other things are not thrown away. But if the wedding is broken off irrevocably, I shall be terribly crippled, terribly!"

"I can't make Sylvia marry him next week, nor can I make him wait for Sylvia six months, mamma. If I were you I wouldn't trouble myself about it yet. If the worst comes, it won't be such a very bad worst. We can all go abroad while you retrench. Dinard is a lovely place and the climate is neither too hot nor too cold, and it's cheap. Or, Davos Platz might do for us for a time; the climate there is more bracing."

"Why have you been getting up this information about cheap continental places?" her mother asked.

"Sylvia put it into my head the other day when she said she meant to marry Dick Ogilvie. I thought it would be better to have them poor away somewhere in the Pyrenees, than poor at Peckham, or in any London locality, where we should be liable to see them continually. Now, you see my information comes in handy for you, if the worst comes to the worst, and you have to break up this house."

"He was going to settle a thousand a year pin-money on her and much more at his death," Mrs. Gould moaned with tears.

"Was he? the dear old thing! Sylvia is a goose! I would give up a thousand Dick Ogilvies for a thousand a year."

"Oh! Lily, Lily! why wasn't it you instead of Sylvia?"

"I can't imagine why it wasn't; I'm much better-looking than she is, and better tempered, and better principled. I never wanted Dick Ogilvie," Lily said reflectively. "It's annoying that we shall lose 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray' to-night through Sylvia's silliness."

"Everything is annoying."

"Well, I don't know about that, mamma. Sylvia has disappointed you a little, but she is not your only daughter."

A little sparkle of exultation came into Lily's eyes as she said this. Before her mother could make up her mind as to what it would be most discreet to reply, Lily had risen leisurely and got as far as the door.

"I will leave you to tell Sylvia what Mr. Christopher said, mamma; it will come better from you than from me. Only make her understand that he quite meant it: if she doesn't marry him this day week he will break it off altogether."

"Are they alone? is any one here?" Sylvia asked hurriedly of the servant who opened the door to her, about half-an-hour before dinner that day.

"Your mamma and the young ladies are upstairs dressing, miss; there's no one in the drawing-room. Mr. Christopher has been here, miss, but I suppose he got tired of waiting for you, for he's gone."

Sylvia breathed a short sigh of relief and ran upstairs. She made a momentary pause at her mother's door, then thought better of entering apparently, and went on to Belle's room. Belle met her with an unsmiling face. To this unspoken reproof Sylvia retorted impatiently:

"I suppose I am in everybody's black books, am I not?"

"If you had seen your mother's distress when you left us, saying you were going to the Ogilvies', you wouldn't speak so lightly about it."

"I didn't say I was going to *the* Ogilvies'; I said I was going to see *Mrs.* Ogilvie."

"That's mere straw-splitting; she knew what you meant. Really I believe it will break your mother's heart if you resume your acquaintance with that man."

"Don't speak of him as 'that man,' Belle; it's such an insultingly disparaging way; it stings me like a cut from a sharp whip. It makes me long to fly to him and tell him that, however much other people despise and look down upon him, I love him better than ever for it."

"My dear Sylvia, you couldn't take a surer way of cooling his ardour for you than by telling him that other people look down upon and despise him and that you know it. Why, a man would be a saint to stand it, and you must admit that he is not that, even if he is not such a sinner as I think him."

"Would it surprise you very much to hear that I didn't go to the Ogilvies' after all this afternoon? Mother's last look stopped me. She didn't look cross, but so wretched. I went into the Grove and wandered about Whiteley's."

"You dear girl!" Belle said heartily. "Your mother will be so happy."

"Staying away from the Ogilvies' doesn't make me like marrying Mr. Christopher a bit better."

"I can't regret that. I think you would be very wrong to marry Mr. Christopher."

"Look here, Belle; I would rather be actively miserable than monotonously miserable. If I am cut off from Dick I shall marry Mr. Christopher."

"He's the lesser evil of the two," Belle said, and Sylvia, not meeting with the verbal opposition she had anticipated, went off to dress.

Ann was in a singularly grim and silent mood this evening, but just as Sylvia was dressed and leaving the room, the woman opened her lips with a snap and said:

"I have had notice to leave, Miss Sylvia."

"Notice to leave? Why?"

The dinner bell rang at the moment and Sylvia was glad to escape from the sound of the nasty laugh which was the only answer Ann vouchsafed to the question.

"I didn't go to Mrs. Ogilvie's," Sylvia found time to whisper to her mother before they sat down to dinner. "Don't look so sad, mother. I didn't go; I wouldn't vex you so."

"You *can* make me so happy, you have it in your power," Mrs. Gould whispered in reply.

When they got away to the drawing-room Lily drew her chair apart from the others into the bay window at the western end of the room, where she could get all the light that was left to fall upon Rudyard Kipling's pages.

"Have you told Sylvia about the loss we have had?" she asked before she settled down to her pleasant task.

"What loss?" Sylvia asked quickly. She hoped for one wild moment that Mr. Christopher had resigned her.

"The loss of 'The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.' Mr. Christopher had a box for her to-night, and as she's the most interesting woman in London—at any rate the one most talked about just now—I consider not seeing her a distinct and heavy loss."

Lily made her complaint smilingly and sweetly.

"You could have gone without me," Sylvia said carelessly.

"Have you told her what Mr. Christopher said, mamma?"

"Not yet, Lily dear."

"You had better do it to-night, I think; there is not much time to lose," Lily said. Then she leant back and surrendered herself entirely to the absorbing interest of the story.

"I will speak to you up in my room before you go to bed to-night, Sylvia," her mother said in a low tone. She was feeling very kindly and gently to this difficult child of hers this night. Sylvia's confession of having been touched into submission to her mother's wishes by the sadness in her mother's face, had softened Mrs. Gould greatly towards her youngest daughter. Perhaps a part of the softening was due to the fact that she had for the first time permitted the suspicion to enter her mind that, underlaying all Lily's sweetness, placidity and good-temper, there was a strong vein of selfishness and indifference to others. Mrs. Gould could not blind herself to the fact that Lily was perfectly callous to her (Mrs. Gould's) anxieties, and was already calculating in a cool, calm, ladylike way upon the chances of stepping into her sister's shoes with Mr. Christopher. Accordingly she unconsciously brought far heavier pressure to bear upon Sylvia by being extremely tender and gentle, than if she had been severe and authoritative.

"Come and let me know the worst at once, mother dear; don't keep me on tenter-hooks till I am going to bed," she pleaded;

and together the mother and daughter went out of the drawing-room.

Lily lifted her eyes from her book for a moment as the door closed behind them, and said to Belle :

"I hope Sylvia wont shilly-shally."

"I hope she won't, for her own sake," Belle replied.

"Yes, and for all our sakes. It will be much pleasanter when there is no longer the faintest possible shadow of doubt as to what she means to do."

"Lily gave Mr. Christopher your message, Sylvia, and as I expected, he won't hear of the six months. It must be this day week, or——never!" Mrs. Gould made the last word more impressive by breaking into a really uncontrollable sob.

"Mother, mother, don't take it like that; if it's never it will be all the happier for me."

"I am so hampered, so fettered," Mrs. Gould went on sobbing. "He has been so good to me, so generous. He has promised—but it's no use telling you, poor child! If you feel you *cannot* marry him, I must face what is before me as best I can."

"Tell me what you were going to say when you checked yourself. You don't—surely you don't owe him money."

"He has promised to free me from all my pecuniary difficulties on your wedding-day. He put it with great delicacy and consideration. He said it should be *your* gift to me."

"The wedding shall be this day week, mother. I won't go back to the drawing-room. You tell them."

She kissed her mother and went up to her room, where she locked the door against Ann, and tried to lock her heart against all loving thoughts of the man she was *not* going to marry, and against all feelings of loathing and revolt about the man to whom she would belong irrevocably by that time next week.

CHAPTER XVI.

A COMFORTER.

WHEN Arthur Stanmer re-entered Dene Prior after an absence of nearly three weeks, his servants might have been forgiven for taking him for merely the spectre of the fine young English gentleman who had gone off so jubilantly to woo and win, his love only the other day as it seemed.

The fact is he knew now that all hope of his being proved to be the eldest legitimate son, and, therefore, the heir of the late Arthur Stanmer, was over now. The claims of the Ogilvies had been found to be incontestable, and he had come down to break the horrible truth to his mother, and to take her away from Dene Prior for ever.

It was an awful moment for him, that in which he entered the home that was no longer his with the shadow of dishonour upon him. Worse than this, the shadow of dishonour was upon the memory of the father of whom he had been so proud, and on the life of the dearly-loved haughty-souled mother who had always gloried in the pride of place to which she had attained through her husband. If he could only have lost Dene Prior without losing his right to still respect and honour his father above and beyond all other men as he hitherto had done, he would have counted himself happy. But as it was, this gruesome truth was driven home pitilessly to his heart. His father had carelessly contracted new holy and vital obligations, without taking the trouble to ascertain whether the old equally holy and vital ones were cancelled or not. That he should have done this when the honour of such a woman as his (Arthur's) mother was involved, nearly broke his heart. The loss of Dene Prior was bitter enough, but it was as nothing compared to the bitterness he tasted in knowing that through his father's carelessness his mother had never been a wife, and he himself was "a bastard," as he had harshly put it to his own lawyer.

He had given many weary days and nights to the consideration of how he could best break it to his mother. She was not a woman to be put off with any lightly slurred or evasively sketchy statement. Where her rights and his were concerned she would insist upon knowing the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He had pictured her attitude of fine scorn while she still disbelieved the claims of "those Ogilvies" a hundred times. He did not dare to picture her abasement when it was borne in upon her that those claims were well grounded.

It seemed to him that there was a significantly solemn air of hush and suppression about the house as he came into it, and for a few wild moments he thought that the "other side" had broken faith, and allowed a rumour of the hideous truth to get bruited abroad before the time which had been agreed upon by

the legal advisers of the opposing families. But this nauseating dread was soon dispelled. The household still recognized him as its rightful master—how he hated posing as such now that he knew how false his claims were! but he did it for his mother's sake—and the air of hush and suppression was fully and painfully accounted for when Rose Davenport met him with the words :

“Your mother has not been very well for the last few days. We are keeping the house very quiet, as she sleeps badly at night, and is dozing just now. Seeing you when she wakes will do her so much good.”

He had strung himself up to the determination to tell his mother this much at least, that they must leave Dene Prior at once—this night. He chafed against the delay of an hour or two even. He longed, poor fellow, to be able to pour out some of his bruised, battered heart to his mother, on whose sympathy he could rely through everything. Her illness fretted rather than frightened him. It was just enough to make it impossible for him to disturb her with his tale of ruin, but if it had been anything serious Miss Davenport would not have kept him in the dark.

He joined Rose Davenport an hour later on in a little octagon room, which “the family” were fond of dining in when they were alone. Rose's hands and taste had made lovely flowers and branches seem to grow from the mantelpiece and round table at which they dined.

“I would have had some of the gold plate out to do honour to your return, but your mother was not well enough to be troubled about details to-day, and I dared not take it on myself to use it without her sanction or yours,” she said, as she sat down facing him in her composed practical way, sweeping all sentimental or frivolously coquettish possibilities aside by the gracefully quiet way in which she expressed that it was inevitable they should dine together without a third at table, and that there was nothing more in it than if they had been a couple of men.

“Fortunately for me I can dine off other plates than those made of gold,” he said dismally, then seeing that the young lady who had been making an effort to abolish all awkwardness and embarrassment from their enforced *tête-à-tête* gave him a quick glance of affectionate resentment, he added :

"I have had some bad news since I have been away. For several days I have been dreading breaking it to my mother. Now it adds to my distress to find that she is too ill to make it safe she should hear now what it is inevitable she must hear later on."

Rose Davenport looked at him searchingly. She longed with all her dear womanly heart to comfort this man, whom, against her will and his own, she had learnt to love. But until he professed his confidence, she could not offer him comfort.

"For the first time in my life I wish I were not a woman. If I were a man friend you would tell me what is troubling you."

She had to say it quickly, for the butler was back in the room even as she spoke, and Arthur was unable to answer her.

But by-and-bye, after he had been up to look at and kiss his mother, who had woke up from her restless sleep, but was too drowsy to say more to him than, "Dear boy! so glad," before she went off into a doze again, Arthur Stanmer reverted to her unanswered remark :

"I can't wish you anything but what you are, and that is the kindest and most sensible friend a man can have. Something is troubling me ; you must know what it is in a day or two ; I may as well tell you now at once. I am not a miserable pretender, Rose, but an unintentional one, but not the less miserable for that. My father married twice ! His son by the first wife is living and is the owner of Dene Prior."

She crossed the space between them swiftly and held out her hands to him. There was nothing sensational or hysterical in the gesture. As soon as he had grasped them as a man is apt to grasp hands that are held out to him in his hour of need, she took them back into her own keeping and sat down, saying quietly :

"It's hard to fall into the place of second son after having believed yourself to be the eldest all your life ; but, in giving up Dene Prior, you don't give up everything. You have your friends and your mother and, above all, yourself left to you still. I have always known you to be a clever man, Mr. Stanmer, and I have always felt a little sorry that something didn't occur to stimulate you to exert yourself to make a name independent of Dene Prior. Now something has occurred, and you will make your name sound ! Tell me you will ?"

"I haven't even a name," he muttered dejectedly; and then brokenly, but in a way that left no doubt upon her mind as to its heart-breaking truthfulness, he told her the whole story.

"You may find out in some way or other that there's a mistake about the worst part of it. I feel sure you will if you try hard, and you must never cease trying, and I will help you just as if I were a man friend," she said, more cheerfully than she felt; but his downcast looks nerved her to the friendly task of pulling him out of his slough of despond.

"There is nothing left to find out; it's all horribly clear," he said moodily. "What do you mean by the worst part of it?"

"It may turn out—it will turn out, I'm sure—that your father had been misled into thinking the first wife dead. *That* is the worst part of it in your eyes, I know, that he should have married your mother before he felt *sure*."

"God bless you, Rose," he said heartily. She had gone to the root of his bitterest grief. She had done him the generous justice of feeling that he prized the honour of his parents before everything in the world. She had given him credit for all that was noblest and most unselfish in his paroxysm of despair. From his heart he blessed her for it, and unconsciously held his head higher again.

After this they spoke freely to one another, and with every word she spoke he realized more and more fully that in this young woman, whom he had hitherto looked upon as a society girl, with a perfect appreciation of her own value as heiress and beauty, as good, true and staunch a friend as a man may ever hope to have here below. Feeling this he came out of the bottomless abyss of misery for a time, until he remembered that he still had the task before him of breaking it to his mother.

"She will bear it better than you think," Rose told him; at the same time she was almost glad to add, "but you must wait for a day till she is stronger."

"It will have to be done in a day or two. I must take her away before those Ogilvies come in and turn us out."

"Don't make up your mind that his hand will be against you, and that it is your duty to your mother and yourself that your hand must be against him. He is your brother after all—your father's son, and will you be angry when I say that he is like you?"

"I know. I have seen him on more than one occasion. He is a good-looking fellow, much better-looking than I am. He has it in everything," he added grimly. "He's legitimate, he's the heir, and he's handsome."

"And don't forget he is your brother into the bargain. Where have you seen him? You haven't told me that."

"I saw him the other night—about three weeks ago—at a smoking concert at the Ramblers.' He sang well; he seemed to be amusing and popular. But I had seen him before that."

"Where?"

He hesitated for a moment or two, love for and loyalty to Belle Warrener battling with his newly-developed friendship for and confidence in Rose. Then he said:

"I won't have any concealments from you; I feel that I can trust you implicitly. When you hear what I have to tell you you will understand why I am not ready to start fraternal relations with Mr. Ogilvie."

Then he told her of his first encounter with Dick the tramp in the water-meadow.

"I can understand your feeling very, very angry. I can understand that you find it hard to forgive, as you are——" She paused to pick out a word that should delicately express to him that she understood what his feelings were about Belle without actually crudely defining them.

"That I am what?"

"Very deeply attached to Miss Warrener—as most people who know her seem to be," she said, colouring a little, for there was a certain amount of pain, well regulated as her pulses were, in speaking of this man's love for another girl; "but when she knows he is your brother she will forgive him for your sake, and then you will forgive him too."

"You speak as if it were possible, in your estimation, that there should be social relations between us."

"Why not? If I suddenly found out that my father had married another wife before he married my mother, and that I had a brother or sister of whom I had never heard before, I shouldn't be angry and want to punish *them* for it. Blood is thicker than water."

He did not like to remind her that the blood which flowed in

the Stanmer veins was a highly superior fluid to that which circulated through the Davenport system.

"I shall go away from here as soon as my mother can be removed ; and I hope I may never hear or see anything that can remind me of Dene Prior again," he said desperately ; and she did what a woman should always do under such circumstances—abstained from arguing, advising and so further aggravating him.

"I will go up and get the latest news of your mother, and bring it to you before I say good-night."

Then she went away, her heart bleeding for the untoward shame, ruin and misery that was being forced upon him, but with a bright, firm look and manner that acted upon him as a tonic. He loved Belle best still in his heart, but how grateful he felt to the girl who was standing shoulder to shoulder with him.

He sat there smoking his cigarette for a long time, waiting for her return with the latest bulletin for 'the night ; and, as he waited, he kept on reminding himself that the butler's attentions were misdirected, as he (Arthur) was no longer master of the house. He could not realize it. That he, Arthur Stanmer, who had been called the young squire for so many years—who seemed to have been founded on such a social rock in the county—should be a nameless outcast, without a penny, in the course of a few days. It was incredible—it was more horrible than the most horrible romance—but it was true, nevertheless.

His thoughts were distracted from the consideration of his own more absolutely personal grievances by Rose Davenport's abrupt re-entrance.

"Your mother is not so well. Will you send for the doctor *at once* ? Stay ; I will tell you what her symptoms are, that you may write them to him, in order that he may come prepared."

"Prepared ? For what ?"

"For her being very ill—for a curious change that has come over her since the doctor saw her last, when he said she was suffering from an attack of influenza. Now she seems to me to be in a high fever, and she is moaning as if she were in great pain. I am so sorry for you—so sorry for you. Do say you're glad I'm here, for I may be of use to her. She is fond of me, and I love

her very much, Mr. Stanmer, in my way, which is not a very demonstrative one."

"She loves you as a daughter; but I have no right to say anything of that kind to you now."

"The same right as ever. I will not say good-night, for I shall stay up till the doctor has seen her."

"You are my good angel," he said gratefully; and when he had written his note and despatched it to the doctor, he found himself hungering for her presence again.

(To be continued.)

“Talking Shop.”

EVERY woman is supposed to take a delight in seeing or hearing of anything new, whatever form it takes, or however it may be presented to her view. Whether she really does so, or not, is a question, but the fact remains that to nearly all of us the getting of new things, more especially clothes, just now, is a necessity, and has to be gone through, whether we look upon it as a pleasure or a trouble. Very probably also, not only for ourselves do we have to make purchases, but for hosts of relations and country cousins, most of these having a blind faith in all that is sent to them from town, and willing to wear any imaginable article of attire if only it bears upon it the *cachet* of a good London shop. Certainly in this age of luxury our wants seem incessant, and what we look upon as bare necessities our grandmothers counted luxuries. But then, everything is so changed since their days. Imagine the contrast between the shopping of, say, fifty or sixty years ago and the present time. Things are made much easier for us than for them, and our only difficulty is to know where to go, and how to choose among the *embarras de richesse* that is shown us on every side. While our ancestors probably were quite contented with their little shops in the nearest country town, where new fashions would only come down perhaps once or at most twice in the year, and where after due consideration they would buy their one winter or summer gown, which would last them for years, and the same with hats, bonnets, and all their articles of dress. They spent a good deal on them and meant them to last, and they did not go out of fashion, or if they did it mattered not, for they wore them just the same. But we require about a dozen dresses where they only wanted one or two, and it is well for us that our *fin de siècle* shopping is carried out in such a different way to the old-fashioned mode.

Economy of time in these days is a great object to many people, and for these busy ones who find the days all too short for what they have to get through it is a great thing to know

where to go, how to spend their money to the best advantage, sparing themselves as much fatigue and waste of time as possible, and yet feel thoroughly satisfied with all their purchases. For who does not know the weariness of wandering about from shop to shop, until at last we are so tired out with the search that we are fain to take anything that is offered, although we know full well that it will never suit us and is by no means what we really wanted. When one has a long list of purchases that absolutely must be made in the day, ranging from all sorts of household necessaries to clothing and wearing apparel of every description for one's self, one's friends, and children of all ages and sizes, there is a vast amount of time saved by doing as much as possible under one roof, and for this sort of shopping stores are the greatest convenience. In former days, except for the village shops, where a little of everything was sold, stores were unknown; and later on one generally associated the name with the idea of provisions, groceries and such like necessary, if rather uninteresting, things. But most of these places now go in as well for millinery, drapery and dressmaking of the very best and most perfect kind, and you are able to fit yourself out from head to foot in a very short time, and satisfy every possible want.

We heard, the other day, that Harrod's stores in the Brompton Road had just opened a new millinery and outfitting department, and that there we should see a wonderful display of all the newest spring and summer fashions, at very reasonable prices. So, armed with a long list of purchases, we went down to examine for ourselves, and see what we could discover. We went straight to the outfitting department, which is not yet quite finished, and first of all were shown some lovely things in the way of tea-gowns, tea-jackets, and all things requisite for a thoroughly well-appointed *trousseau*. One graceful tea-gown of a new kind of silk *crépon*, blue-green in colour, made in the Empire style, with soft lace falling from the square yoke, and broad ribbons tying in front, was most fascinating, and very inexpensive too at three guineas; while they have some wonderfully cheap and pretty *crépons* in all colours trimmed with ribbons at the low price of 27s. These are really good too, and look worth double that amount. Here, also, we saw a very dainty pale-blue surah tea-jacket, with quantities of cream lace upon it, which would make any woman long to possess that most luxurious garment. Silk

lingerie is decidedly a *spécialité* of this place, for they showed us some of the most exquisite soft silk *robes de nuit* imaginable, trimmed with Valenciennes lace and ribbon, while their hand-made, frilled, French cambric and lawn under-garments were extremely pretty and wonderfully inexpensive, and a cream silk under-skirt, with wide insertion and flouncings of lace, was quite the nicest thing of its kind that could be seen. Blouses and shirts are more worn than ever, so we examined an enormous stock of these, from the pretty cool-looking holland and linen so much worn just now, to the daintiest and most elaborate evening ones of silk and lace, all of the newest make. To wear with these, they showed us some very well cut and remarkably inexpensive serge skirts and coats, and for those who like to look "tailor made" there are some smart double-breasted waistcoats. One of these, in a Newmarket check cloth with pearl buttons, struck us as being particularly trim-looking, and for other occasions the soft accordion pleated fronts (especially those in cream surah), made with a large bow and lace ends in front, were extremely dainty and fresh. In this same room too we noticed an entirely new style of "Studio" or housekeeping aprons. These are of spotted, striped or plain linen, and come well over the dress. With the pretty square yoke and deep-pointed belt, they make not merely a useful, but a very ornamental addition to any morning dress.

Next we passed on to the children's things, which are really brought as near perfection as possible, more particularly the white embroidered cashmere frocks and pelisses made in the loose smock style, that prettiest of all fashions for the little ones. The Dutch bonnets of cream silk are quite a new idea, and also the pretty, quaint, three-cornered white felt hats, just the thing for a small page at a wedding or a boy just out of baby's clothes.

Then we went on to the millinery department and saw a variety of hats and bonnets ready trimmed, and multitudes of shapes which an obliging milliner will undertake to turn out for you in any way you fancy at the lowest possible price and in the shortest possible time. Some jet *toques* here are very *chic*, and can be worn instead of a bonnet (which does not suit all faces), on those occasions when the latter head-covering is *de rigueur*. There is a new sort of pale yellow straw, which is extremely pretty and is very much used at present. You can get it here in

any shape, and it is very cool and fresh looking, and just the thing for hot weather. The new sunshades we were very much pleased with. Those of black moiré and satin, with a wide appliqué of rose-point guipure round the edge, are perhaps the nicest ; but there are some extremely pretty parasols also, lined with a colour and with black insertion let in all round. As we left this room we found our way into the conservatory, which is truly delightful. It is large and lofty, with a frieze running round the top of beautifully painted wild flowers. In the middle there is a fountain playing, surrounded with water lilies, and tall palms and tropical plants of all kinds are grouped around, while at one end is a perfect wealth of cut flowers. Roses, lilac, mignonette and lilies make the air quite heavy with their fragrance, and everywhere about are growing plants and shrubs. Among these little tables are placed, where tea is served, and directly out of this, a corridor leads to the restaurant, a lofty hall, supported by marble pillars, with a tessellated floor on which Indian rugs are strewn. Here you are quickly and promptly served by girls dressed in pale willow-green Liberty dresses and large frilled aprons. There is a waiting-room opening out of this, fitted up in Oriental style, with an Indian matting dado on pale-green walls, and every facility is at hand for writing letters and sending off telegrams, while all the daily and weekly papers lying about prevent your finding any waiting time dull or wearisome.

Harrod's is really a wonderful place. They are so thoroughly up-to-date in every department, and there is nothing you cannot find here, and all of the best and newest description, from household necessities of all kinds to clothes. Certainly, it is very easy to create wants, simply by looking at all the pretty things, and noting the new ideas everywhere displayed, for surely never were the shops so fascinating as they are just now. For this is the season when all the world is at its brightest and its best, and we also feel the absolute necessity of being in harmony with the gay surroundings, and "turning ourselves out" to the best of our ability. As far as clothes are concerned, this generally means a thorough renovation, and every chance of doing this is given us, merely by gazing in at the various shop windows, and discovering what is most likely to suit us amongst all the tempting things therein to be seen.

LONDON SOCIETY.

JUNE, 1894.

A Bad Lot.*

By MRS. LOVETT CAMERON,

Author of "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," "A SISTER'S SIN," "JACK'S SECRET,"
"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

A REVELATION.

THE telegraph boy was coming up the drive at Marshlands. Nell saw him from her bedroom window. There was only one boy who carried telegrams from the post office in the village, and he was mainly engaged in bringing them backwards and forwards to Marshlands House. Tom Beales was employed in the choir as well as in the telegraph office, which should have vouched for the respectability and responsibility of his character; but he was an evil-minded boy whose soul was set upon mischief, and was ever disposed to consider pleasure before duty, after the manner of unregenerate boyhood.

He never hurried himself. Nations might fall, or, what was nearer the mark, horses might win or lose, and fortunes might change hands, before Tom Beales would consent to hasten his lagging footsteps. He always dawdled, and if possible he always chucked stones.

He was at his usual games now. The drive from the tumble-down lodge at the gates up to the door of the house ran no longer through a green and sylvan park in these latter days. On either side there were unlovely turnips planted in close set rows, belonging to Mr. Wilkes, the worthy farmer who rented the land up to the very garden fence. Amongst these turnips—swedes they were, to give them their rightful name; unsavoury vegetables,

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whence strong and pungent odours were wont to be wafted unpleasantly to the noses of the Miss Forresters when the wind set in that direction—a careful observer such as Mr. Tom Beales was able to descry sundry insignificant living things. There were sparrows by the score, there was an occasional field mouse, and there was also now and again a barn-door chick that, moved by a spirit of inquiry, had strayed beyond the limits of its home amongst the back yards of the house, and at rare intervals there might also be seen a cat. At each and all of these creatures Mr. Beales considered that it behoved him to stand and shy the frequent pebble.

Sometimes in the excitement of the chase he left the road and plunged into the "roots," in pursuit of his prey; sometimes he only stalked the game cautiously, backwards or forwards as the case might be, along the narrow grass margin of the road.

It will be understood, therefore, that telegrams due at Marshlands House were not, under these circumstances, delivered with any unseemly haste or punctuality.

"There is your telegram, Dottie, coming up the road," said Nell, looking into the study when she got downstairs. "Tom Beales is, as usual, taking his time over it."

"The little beast!" cried Dottie, springing up angrily from her book, which, of course, was "Ruff's Guide to the Turf"—a volume that was scarcely ever out of her hands. "And here am I, in a perfect fever! Poppet promised to send me a wire the moment the race was over, and that telegram, my sweet children, will make a woman or a mouse of your sister; if Thalassa pulls this race off I stand to win ten pounds; if not, I am undone! Where is that fiendish boy? I will be the death of him some day."

"He is at the present moment pursuing one of our Cochin China cocks in and out of the mangel-wurzels," observed Millie, who happened to be kneeling in front of the window teaching the Irish terrier to balance biscuits on his nose.

Dottie fled like a whirlwind out of the room.

"I'll teach him to chase Cochin China cocks," she cried savagely, "when I am waiting for my telegrams!"

For that a telegram could ever come for anybody else in the house, save for Dotty, did not enter remotely into any one's calculations. Dottie kept the Marshlands telegraphic wire going

—it is doubtful whether it would have had any existence at all but for her, or if in the whole parish there were half-a-dozen telegrams sent or received in the course of the year by anybody but Miss Dorothea Forrester. Nobody at Marshlands took much interest in the thrilling events of the racing world save herself, although, to do Dottie justice, whenever she did happen to win her money, the whole household fared for a space more sumptuously, and was treated to certain unaccustomed luxuries that were unknown to it under ordinary circumstances.

Meanwhile, Millie continued her canine instructions. Snap sat on his hind legs and looked many piteous and unutterable things at her out of his soft, pathetic brown eyes, and the little pink tip of his quivering tongue fluttered up frequently towards the corner of his nose, in the direction of the broken biscuit.

“Ah! you would, would you, bad dog! quiet, steady; don't you dare to touch it. Trust, Trust, if you take it before I tell you, you will catch it, sir!” and crack went the dog-whip, within six inches of his head.

“I can't think how you can torment that poor dog so, Millie,” cried Nell impatiently. “Of what use is that senseless trick? Dogs are so delightful in themselves; their own natural ways are so charming; why not leave them as they are? If one were to devote one's whole life to the study, I doubt if one would be able to entirely fathom the depths of one single dog's character. To teach tricks to a dog is to degrade his natural qualities; besides, you make him miserable. Only look at the reproach in Snap's eyes; it is heartrending!”

“I quite agree with you, Nell; but that wretch Ducky jeered at me so horribly the other day because none of my dogs can do tricks; he says they only know how to bark and bite, so I was determined to show him——”

“What on earth is the meaning of this?” here said Dottie's voice at the door; the open telegram was in her hands, and she was reading it over with a puzzled face. “I can't make head or tail of it: *'Cannot come Sunday; try to understand and forgive.'* Who cannot come Sunday? Poppet never meant to come; and 'forgive'—what am I to forgive? Is it my sovereign that he has forgotten to put on to Thalassa, after all? If so, I shall certainly never forgive him, when he might have got me such a splendid price! and as to understanding—Oh! I don't believe it can be

from Poppet at all. Why, it comes from Fenchester, and Poppet is at Newmarket."

Nell, who had been crouching down between Snap and the window, rose slowly to her feet. She turned suddenly very white—a cold rigidity seemed to benumb her senses—she held out her hand towards her sister.

"I think the telegram is for me, Dottie."

"For you, Nell? Is it?" turning to the envelope in her other hand; "it is addressed to 'Miss Forrester.' I am sure I am very sorry if I opened it, but how was I to know? But are you quite certain it is for you? It seems quite incomprehensible; that stupid girl at the post-office must have made some mistake."

"I think I know what it means," said Nell dully.

She felt as though some one had given her a hard blow. There was a dumb, stupid apathy within her, but she did not feel any pain—not yet.

"Oh, if so, of course it is yours, Nell, and I apologize for opening it. But did you expect your young man on Sunday? I thought you said he wasn't coming down this week? and why in the name of fortune does he wire from Fenchester? Good gracious, child! I hope to goodness you and Cecil haven't quarrelled; that would be simply awful."

"It has nothing to do with Cecil," answered Nell a little confusedly, and then, dreading more searching sisterly questions, she went quickly away out of the room, with the telegram which Dottie had given up to her, in her hand.

She went and stood by the open hall door; winter and summer alike, everybody left the front door open at Marshlands. The day was moist and chill; the sky was one wash of dull and uniform grey, utterly unbroken and still; a faint mist shaded the distant lines of the landscape, so that they melted away into the sky. There were no boisterous winds nor storm-rent clouds to-day. Far away down the drive, Tom Beales was beating a leisurely retreat, chucking stones to the right and the left of him as he went.

Nell stood quite still, looking out at the familiar scene with the message of disappointment crushed up in her hands.

"I am dreadfully disappointed." She said the words aloud twice over, as though to emphasize them to herself. "He promised to come and see me, and now he will not. It is a great disappointment."

She dwelt upon the word conscientiously and earnestly. She was quite sure that she was disappointed. Yet, at the bottom of her heart there lay, not disappointment, but despair!

Presently she turned away and went slowly upstairs to her own room. For some minutes she stood quite still in the centre of it. A large photograph of Cecil in a red plush frame stood upon the table; there was another of him in his wig and gown on the mantelpiece behind her. She turned slowly round and looked at them both, first at one and then at the other.

She had been so pleased with them when Cecil had given them to her. Was it a fortnight or three weeks ago? She could not remember. It seemed only yesterday that he had brought them down, and had kissed her as he gave them to her, and she had been quite happy and contented then, and had felt glad that she was going to be his wife. It was only the other day—and now—now!

Her eyes dropped slowly down to the telegram in her hand—a telegram can never be a very romantic missive, the bald unsympathetic wording leaves no room for the details of joy or sorrow; yet, if it brings us bad news, it is perhaps a more deadly medium of grief than the longest letter that can be penned, whilst if it brings us joy, we have no need of more. Pages of explanatory sentences could not have made Julian Temple's meaning more distinct to Nell than those eight words which brought to her so strange a mingling of rapture and despair, so that each one of them burnt itself in letters of fire into her heart.

"He will not come!" had been her first blank thought of misery; "it was my only chance, my one solitary hope of seeing him again, and now it has withered and perished, and I have no hope any more." That had been all that had come home to her at first. Now she read the concluding words of the message again, "*try to understand and forgive.*" A slow light woke in her eyes; her white cheeks flamed into crimson; her curved lips parted into a smile of triumph and joy, whilst quick little breaths broke swiftly and tumultuously out of the riotous and sudden excitement at her heart.

"My God! he loves me!" she said to herself in a whisper; "he loves me!" and then she threw herself down upon her bed and buried her face amongst the pillows.

For a long time there was no other thought.

"He loves me!" she murmured at intervals to herself; "Julian Temple loves me! It is because of his honour that he dare not come. Yes, Julian, yes, I understand."

The discovery she had made filled her whole soul; she wanted nothing more. Life was full, joy was completed; there was nothing left on earth or under heaven for her to desire or long for; he was her other self, that "twin-soul" of which the poets have written, who dwells somewhere in the wide-reaching spaces of the vast unfathomable universe for each of us, without whom the existence of every living creature must for ever remain incomplete and void, and from whom so many of us—such tens of thousands—so far the larger portion of sad and suffering human-beings—are destined to be for ever and for ever estranged. But to her, Nell Forrester, that companion-being had come! She had met him face to face; across the dull darkness of the world they had grasped each other's hands; all unconsciously and unwittingly they had drawn near to one another; and that great and beautiful secret, which is not so much human love as human affinity, had been revealed to them both.

For a long while this wonderful thought—entrancing, absorbing, and absolutely bewildering—was all that she was capable of realizing.

She knew now that love had come to her at last—the love she had only dreamed of hitherto, dimly and darkly—that she had known to exist, and yet had never found. The blind and selfish passion of a Vane Darley had but caricatured it. The cold conventionality of a Cecil Roscoe was but its pallid reflection—the unreal shadow of the substance itself. But in Julian Temple all that she had desired and longed for most seemed to be united—strength and tenderness, passion and heart-worship, and that subtle union of thought and sympathy that forms the deepest and most lasting bond of all between two people who are mutually attracted to one another.

And then, after all this rapture of thrilling delight, there came at last to poor Nell the inevitable reaction. For the "soul" in us, in this sordid and work-a-day world, is so weak and feeble a portion of us, it is but now and again, at rare and trembling intervals, that it is able to spread its wide white wings and draw us up into the blue ethereal vault of heaven. Fain would we be rid of the fleshly burden that drags us down again to earth,

and remain for ever in those empyrean heights above ; but, alas, it is not given to the sons of men to shake off the hard and practical conclusions of life for more than a few brief and transitory moments. Nell Forrester, after that swift and ecstatic flight into the regions of deathless joy, came down very rapidly again to the level of this lower world. She sat up at last on the little white bed, on which, in her first delirium, she had flung herself, and, whilst the tears of her rapture lay still wet upon her pillow, other tears of more bitter import gathered slowly and painfully in her aching eyes.

For it was only a dream—a beautiful and impossible dream : a glimpse of a heaven she might never enter, a glimmer of light through a half-opened doorway that was to be close shut again for ever!

What Julian Temple had meant her to understand was as clear as daylight to her. He would come no more. That thing which to a woman is so vague and intangible, and to a man is so real and so tremendous in its impassable strength, that barrier which men call “honour,” and women—God forgive them—often call foolishness, stood between them, barring for ever the way that might have led to happiness and to joy.

It was all over. Whatever else life might contain for her, Julian Temple must be for ever left out of it.

In time she would grow old ; she would get accustomed to her fate ; those dream images that had seemed so sacred and so dear, would all be left wrecked and stranded upon the golden shores of hope and of youth. Hope would die ; youth become a dwindling phantom along the dreary vista of the years ; and love—the love that might have filled her life with gladness—would fade into a pale faint vision ; the memory of a “might have been ;” a lost and missed possibility that had never really been within her grasp.

In all human experience there is none so sad and so bitter as this : to know what would have made our life worth living, to see and understand the one thing that would have been for our soul's best peace ; and, yet, by an irony of fate, to miss it altogether and for evermore !

CHAPTER XVII.

CECIL'S BANK NOTES.

GORDON FORRESTER had been having a very good time of it ever since his youngest daughter had been engaged to be married. He was a man who, up to now, had been desperately unlucky all his life.

Some people do not believe in "luck," and are wont to declare that misfortunes only assail those who lay themselves out to court them; that troubles arise mainly from mistakes and mis-managements, and that if a man complains of ill-luck, he has in the long run, only himself to thank for it.

It is certainly the case that when we commit ourselves to a line of action that we are well aware to be unwise and imprudent, we perhaps deserve but little pity when the inevitable consequences of that action overtake us.

Yet there are certain people who, throughout their lives, appear always fated to do the wrong thing, and whom a malignant retribution seems to follow up with a relentless severity, that others, no less faulty than themselves, are more fortunate in escaping.

No doubt Gordon Forrester had had only himself to thank for his calamitous marriage and its disastrous ending. Yet he scarcely ever looked at it in that light. He was not nearly so shocked and horrified as his neighbours were at the event which had brought shame upon his name and reproach upon his innocent children. He had a casual way of regarding things—it was very bad luck certainly, and fell hard upon him—but in his own mind his wife was still "poor Geraldine" to him. He kept her photograph upon his bedroom mantelpiece, and often wondered what had become of her; he had loved and admired her in his own way, and he had never been hard on her for her sin. His brother had been indignant with him because he had flatly refused to institute divorce proceedings against her, and had ended by quarrelling with him entirely and solely on that account.

"Poor girl; why should I persecute her?" had been the remark of the injured husband, with a careless shrug of his shoulders. "And as to the law courts, I'd as soon keep out of

them. One is certain to drop one's money at that game, and I'd rather spend mine more amusingly than in filling the lawyers' pockets."

"But think of your honour, Gordon! Of the family name dragged in the mud by that disgraceful creature!" had urged Sir Robert in that long-gone-by interview.

"Tut, tut, my dear Bob! The poor girl was terribly bored at home; one must make some excuses for her; she wasn't a lady, you see, to begin with, and though she tried her best to become one, these d——d women about here wouldn't help her a bit. Not one of them would call on her or be kind to her, and yet she had as good a heart as anybody that ever lived. And perhaps it was, in a measure, my fault; I left her a great deal alone; I was always out myself. Anyhow, I'm not going to be hard on her now. She don't want to get married to this chap, I expect; all she wants is to amuse herself. I shall let her alone. 'Live and let live' is my motto."

Well, no doubt it was not only a very reprehensible decision, but also a very mistaken one; for, as the years went on so, too, did the scandal live, and people were not slow to remember the mother who still bore the name of Forrester, and who had never been repudiated by her too indulgent and careless husband. They said to one another that by his own inaction Gordon Forrester had made it impossible for anybody to associate with his daughters or to do anything to lift them out of the mire of their mother's disgrace. For she was still his wife; although no one had ever heard any more about her fate, it was manifestly still possible for her to return at any moment to her husband's house.

That was by no means the only mistake of Gordon Forrester's life. If he had chosen he might have lived within the limits of his small income. It had been open to him at first to let Marshlands furnished, and to take his girls abroad and educate them well and cheaply in some French or Belgian city. In a prolonged absence of several years the past would have been to a great extent forgotten; and he could have economized, and could have been able to pay his way and to live honestly and creditably. But such an uprooting of all his habits of life did not commend itself to his indolent and egotistical nature. It was ever so much easier to stop on where he was, to run into debt and to borrow

money when he was hard up, to let the park and the fields to the neighbouring farmers, and to allow his daughters to grow up anyhow, uneducated and untrained, and so he allowed the opportunity to slip by. Dottie and Millie, indeed, had been sent to school for a few years, but English schools are expensive, and the experiment was not continued for long, and Nell had received no regular instruction at all to speak of. This, however, did not trouble their father in the least. They all of them muddled along somehow and anyhow at Marshlands, and no one, except Nell, had ever taken life in the least from a serious point of view.

"I don't see the use of education for girls," Gordon would say if any one called his attention to the fact of his daughters' lack of learning. "All a woman requires is marriage; and there isn't any science or any language that ever was taught in a school that teaches them how to get husbands so well as their own wits do."

And it was, perhaps, the greatest trouble of his later days that his daughters, in spite of this theory, had none of them yet achieved the, to him, sole aim and object of a woman's existence.

So he really looked upon it as a very great piece of good fortune when Nell was engaged to be married. It was a good marriage, too; a sound, respectable connection of which even Gordon Forrester's careless mind was forced to admit the material advantages. Nell would be placed in a good position; she would be fairly well off, and have a house in London, and of course she would be able to help her sisters. It was quite on the cards that one of them being married, the others would, by her help, very soon follow suit.

"If only I can get them all three comfortably settled and off my hands, I should be able to live a decent life again," he was thinking as he sat one evening with a pipe in his mouth by his library fire. "I think I would shut the old place up and go and look up some of my old friends in London and Paris. In London of course, I could stay with Nell or with one of the others"—his thoughts running rampantly on ahead—"it would be cheap, and very much more cheerful than at the mother's house, and I dare say they would be always glad to put me up. And then in Paris? Let me see, Madame de Sarcy must still be alive, I should say.

I might go and find her out. By God! what a fine woman that was! and she used to be very fond of me at one time. Ah! those were glorious days! the days when I was young and free, and the women called me 'Handsome Gordie.'"

And the prematurely aged and worn-out man, in his old and shabby black velvet suit, the only attempt at evening dress he ever made at home, sighed as he recalled his past triumphs and successes in those golden days of his youth before he had committed the greatest and most irretrievable mistake of his life.

"Poor Geraldine!" he said softly after a few moments. "It was a pity perhaps that I married her, she'd have been just as happy as she was, and we neither of us hankered particularly after respectability, and yet, I don't see what else could very well have been done under the circumstances, when she lost her engagement at the Frivolity and there was nobody else but me. I have not been a good man, I suppose; but I think I should have been a worse one if I hadn't married her, poor girl!" and then he sighed again and wished that "Poor Geraldine" could have seen her way to sticking to him. "It would have been better for the girls," he thought, and that was all the reproach he ever cast at the wife for whom he had sacrificed his life, and who had rewarded him by betrayal and desertion. Then presently his thoughts returned to the daughter by whose means good fortune seemed to be coming back once more to him and his. Already in these last few weeks there had been a glimmer of many kinds of better things for him. There had been some small social triumphs to which he had long been a stranger, and which were soothing and gratifying to him. Only this morning, in Fenchester—it being market day, and his custom to go into the town for a little variety, just to moon about with his hands in his pockets and to exchange a few words with the farmers and the shopmen—this very day a new thing happened to him. Lord Redstoke, the great man of the neighbourhood, had stopped him and congratulated him on his daughter's engagement, whilst Lady Redstoke, who had been wont to ignore him and look straight in front of her as she drove by, bowed to him quite graciously as she sat in her carriage in front of the circulating library in the market place.

"A good marriage too, I hear, for your girl, Mr. Forrester," Lord Redstoke had said condescendingly; "the youngest, is

it? Ah, well, I am very glad to hear one of them is going to be married. The Roscoes are most respectable people—to be married at Easter, and to live in London, is she? Well, we shall not forget her; Lady Redstoke will be sure to call upon the bride when she goes up to town for the season.”

Gordon Forrester was not at all too proud to be pleased by the proffered patronage, although all these years he had affected to despise the people who had dropped and ignored him, declaring that he wanted none of them, and that he and his girls could get along very well by themselves; yet deep down in his heart there had no doubt been many sore and angry heart-burnings, which this tardy acknowledgment served to soothe and smooth away.

And Lord Redstoke had not been the only one to hold out the hand of reconciliation, for where the lion leads the way the smaller animals are never slow to follow. Others who had heard and seen the meeting, came up also and spoke to him and offered their congratulations, giving him to understand that this marriage of his girl was well regarded by his country neighbours and might open the door to better things for them all in the future.

Then over and above all this there was yet another source of secret satisfaction in Gordon Forrester's heart to-night; his future son-in-law was an excellent young man in all ways, no doubt, but chiefly so to his father-in-law elect in that he was of a generous and confiding disposition. Presently Gordon took out a key from his pocket and opened a drawer in his writing-table, and as he opened it he smiled to himself. Greedily and furtively he opened it, looking behind him as he did so towards the door, which was ajar, and through which there came the scent of cigarettes and the click of balls and the loud merry voices of Dottie and Millie and of the young fellows who had come over from the barracks to play billiards with them. The game to-night was pool, and the fun was fast and furious—Dottie's shrill voice well above the rest shouting and screaming as usual:

“Poppet, you are cheating. I swear you are. No, you can't put back your ball and have that stroke over again; you must lose a life. I tell you I *saw* you push the blue out from the cushion. Ducky, hold him back! don't let him play! Millie, set Snap at him! Oh, Captain Toulmin, you will really think us all cracked.

Nell is the only sane one amongst us, and she is in love. Why does love make some people melancholy? Nell is just now perfectly funereal in her ways. Poppet, I love you desperately sometimes, but it doesn't depress me in the very least. Perhaps that is because I also hate you at times so intensely; the one passion counteracts the other. When you cheat or forget to back the winner for me, I simply detest you, and now I swear you shan't have that stroke again. Millie, set the dogs at him, do!"

Then followed a wild commotion—shouts of laughter, screams and scuffles; the young ladies were apparently chasing the gentlemen round the billiard table. A general scrimmage ensued. The men crawled under the table or clambered over it; the girls rushed round and round, and the dogs, joining delightedly in the fray, careered about with frantic and deafening barks. In the confusion a little table upset with a crash, and a soda-water tumbler was shivered into atoms on the stone flagged floor; after which the unfortunate Mr. Popham was dragged out by the heels from his hiding-place under a sofa, and was violently set upon and punished about the face by a batterade of footstools and cushions.

Gordon was accustomed to it all. He rather liked to hear them. The girls always "romped" when the subalterns were there in force; and when they romped they generally kicked up an infernal shindy. There did not seem to him to be any harm in it at all—it was only play; they kept the house alive with it. But Gordon knew very well from the peculiar style of pandemonium that was going on just now that Nell was not with the rest. Nell somehow was so different to the others; he wondered why. She had always been a quiet little thing; she did not amuse and interest him half so much as her sisters did. She was not his favourite child at all, but just now she was of more importance to him than all the rest. He supposed there must be something in her after all; for with all her quietness she had managed to catch a husband before her sisters. Perhaps she was really cleverer than either of them.

"But, by Jove!" he thought, "if I were a young fellow, it's Dottie I'd have gone for. A fine woman is Dottie, with a spirit of her own. Little Nell isn't a patch on her."

But it was because he was sure that she was not there, and would not be likely to come in and catch him, that he ventured to open that secret drawer and to count over his treasure

with hands that trembled a little with eagerness. Five crisp new Bank of England ten pound notes. It was years since Gordon Forrester had fingered so much money. There was a little gloating light in his faded eyes, and a greedy smile that flickered over his wrinkled face. When one is very hard up, and one has depended for a long while upon chance loans and windfalls, a good fat comfortable sum like fifty pounds is apt to make a man's heart beat and his mouth water. Gordon Forrester had never looked at any woman in his life so tenderly and lovingly as he looked at those crisp and rustling bank notes.

"A good boy!" he murmured; "a good, generous boy! I never thought he would respond to my little appeal so liberally; a tender, perhaps—that is all I expected. But this—this is princely, quite munificent! and the best of a loan from a son-in-law is that it's exactly like a loan from a mother—one need never repay it. Cecil is certain to look upon it in that light; good, generous fellow that he is. But he shall have my I.O.U.—Oh, yes—that is only right in case of my death. I will send him an I.O.U. to-morrow."

He was in the act of replacing the notes safely into the drawer when a foot-fall sounded across the oak floor behind him, and a light hand was laid upon his shoulder.

He started guiltily, and shuffled the notes hastily back together, shutting up the drawer with a bang. Nell had come in through another door, and so quietly that it was not until she was standing behind him that he realized that she was there.

"Oh, my dear, how you made me jump! I declare you quite frightened me! You came in like a ghost, my dear Nell; positively like a ghost!" and Gordon laughed a little nervously, and busied himself assiduously amongst the loose papers on his writing table to cover his confusion; but he knew very well that she must have seen.

"Papa, where did you get all those bank notes?" said the voice of the young Inquisitor behind him.

"Oh, only a little windfall, my love—just a mere trifle—a small legacy that I have come into."

But, with an unerring instinct, Nell knew. She had not been Gordon Forrester's child all these long years for nothing.

"Did Cecil give you that money?"

"My dear Nell, do not insult your own father! 'Give!' One

gentleman does not *give* money to another. A gentleman may, indeed, accept a loan."

"And Cecil lent you this?"

"He was kind enough to oblige me with it, certainly, under all proper conditions," replied Mr. Forrester loftily. "He will receive my acknowledgment and my I.O.U., which I intend to send to him by the first post to-morrow. It is a very ordinary transaction, my dear child, I assure you. You need not distress your little heart in the least on behalf of your future husband."

"But, papa, what is the good of your I.O.U.?"

"My dear Nell, do you mean to impugn my honour?" cried her father in a shocked and horrified voice.

"But how can you ever pay Cecil back?" persisted the girl remorselessly. "I daresay you would if you could, but you know how poor we are. Where is the money—all that money—to come from? There must be eighty pounds there at least."

"Oh, no, no! Now, my love, you are exaggerating; say fifty."

"Fifty! and where are you to find fifty pounds?" cried Nell, with real distress. "Papa, pray send the money back to him."

Mr. Forrester laughed softly. Nell's words were mere childishness to him.

"My dear little girl, you are talking great nonsense. Our dear Cecil is only too glad to be of use to me, and as to repayment, really, my dear Nell, it is a very poor compliment to your own charms that you pay yourself, if you can doubt that Cecil considers himself amply repaid already. I am giving him my daughter; how can filthy dross, a miserable fifty pounds, weigh in the balance against so priceless a treasure as yourself, my child? Nevertheless, if only to satisfy you, as I have told you already, he shall have my I.O.U. All the usual formalities shall be complied with, although in this case, a case that may be said to lie between the hearts of a father and his children, such formalities are totally superfluous."

Nell said no more. She sat down wearily in an arm-chair by the hearth, and leant her tired head upon her hand and stared into the red embers of the faintly flickering fire. If for one wild moment she had dreamt of being true to her secret instincts, and of throwing up her engagement to Cecil because of that wonderful discovery in her own heart that she had so lately made, all such thoughts now vanished into thin air. That her father should be

in Cecil Roscoe's debt seemed only one more link to strengthen the chain that bound her to him. A moment ago, when she had crept softly into her father's study and had laid her fluttering hand on his shoulder, it had been in Nell's mind to have said to him: "I cannot marry Cecil Roscoe; I do not love him; I love some one else, and I will not marry where I do not love." But at the sight of those fluttering bank notes in her father's trembling hands, the desperate words had died away upon her lips. Gordon Forrester never knew how near at that moment he had been to receiving a shock that would have cruelly upset all his new plans and hopes. Nell said nothing more, she only sat down behind him dully and dejectedly. "Yes, Cecil has been very good to me and mine," she thought miserably, "He does not deserve that I should treat him badly; it would be base and shameful of me to throw him over now; I must not, cannot do it. In his own queer, cold way I believe that he loves me, and it would make him very unhappy if I were to be false to him, and, besides, does not everything, even this money, bind me to him? What good should I do if I were to break with him?" and she sighed wearily. For if in a weak moment Julian Temple had allowed her to perceive that he liked her too much to be merely her friend, yet Nell was scarcely vain enough to suppose that this new and wonderful attraction to herself could be sufficiently deep rooted to make him suggest, or even desire, that she should throw Cecil over for his sake.

On the contrary, that which his telegram had implied was totally the reverse. In so many words Julian Temple had said to her:

"There is danger in this friendship of ours; and into that danger I do not mean to run."

When a man says this to a woman, there is no other course open to her but to submit. She was wise enough, too, to understand that a man must be very desperately in love before he will go deliberately out of his way to overstep those strong and instinctive barriers which lie between his honour and a forbidden love.

However lightly she might hold that same vague and unattractive virtue of "honour," she knew well that to a man of Julian Temple's calibre it must be a very tangible and living reality, and that the discretion which is the better part of valour, and which

urged him now to avoid and shun her altogether, was a sufficient evidence of the light in which he too probably regarded it.

Even if she herself had the strength or the power to break off her engagement to Cecil, would Julian Temple be at all likely to take advantage of it or to rush again into the situation on which he was so resolutely determined now to turn his back? She could not tell. She only knew that she felt sick at heart and very helpless; that the little courage she might have summoned to her aid was flickering feebly in the socket, and that the sight of Cecil Roscoe's bank notes in her father's hands seemed to put the final stroke to the hopelessness of a cause that was already as good as lost.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EVIL REPORT.

It has, I think, been said before that there was no man on earth for whom Cecil Roscoe entertained a higher regard and esteem than for Julian Temple. It was, perhaps, chiefly because the older man was so totally and entirely dissimilar to himself that Cecil, from the first hour of their acquaintance—an hour which dated from his earliest days in London—had been so strongly attracted by him.

There was, possibly, a little one-sidedness about their friendship, Temple's tastes and thoughts differing widely from his. Neither did their characters hold anything in common. If Temple's was the deeper and more thoughtful nature, Roscoe was far more shrewd and worldly wise. Julian's ideals were lofty and pure, almost too much so, indeed, to be practically workable. Cecil, on the contrary, had no exalted theories, but, on the other hand, he held certain strict and undeviating principles, such as his friend had no sympathy with. The inherent tenderness of Julian's heart, combined with the extreme wideness of his views, made a broader-minded man of him altogether than the young barrister, who was hard and intolerant in his judgments and somewhat rigidly unbending in his decisions. Temple could put himself, mentally, in another person's place, and he knew how to temper his opinions with a wide charity; but Cecil had no place but his own, and no standing point but the fixed rules of an unalterable standard.

Yet for all that he turned naturally to Julian in all the troubles

and joys of his life ; the sympathy that was in the man softened him insensibly, whilst the known rectitude of his life excited his admiration and commanded his respect. It was, therefore, nothing wonderful that he should betake himself one morning to the pleasant rooms in Piccadilly where Julian, when in London, was habitually to be found.

By good luck Temple was in town and at home. He had returned only last night from some rather protracted country visit, the three days in Fenshire—where he had been in bad spirits as well as in bad form, and had shot detestably—having been followed up by a week in Yorkshire and a few days' hunting in Cheshire. He had recovered his capabilities for sport, and his spirits and temper completely during the last week, and had returned to London refreshed in body and entirely reinstated in his own good opinion of himself. He was now minded to give himself up for a time to literary work. There was a half-finished article on his conscience to which he was resolved to apply himself with vigour and assiduity. There had been a brief space, a little while ago, during which he had felt incapable of tackling it. But, thank God, that was over now, and as he sat at his wide writing table, surrounded by books of reference and with a little sheaf of foolscap paper that grew and warmed into life under his rapid pen, he was, and he felt himself to be, one of the happiest men, at peace with the whole world, or what is better still, at peace with himself. For nothing in the whole of this world is a better antidote for the troubles of life than mental labour heartily performed. It is doubtful indeed whether there are any earthly griefs so great, or any disappointments so bitter, that they cannot be assuaged and lessened by means of literary work. Only, if the Goddess of Comfort is to be won, she must be wooed in earnest. The writer's heart must be in it, and his work must be the very best that he can give ; for according to his work, so will his reward be. I take it, that the consolations of religion are to the majority of mankind simply not in it in comparison with the consolations of work, the work, I mean, that engrosses the whole heart and mind and being. Oh ye idlers ! ye flutterers upon life's stream of pleasure, whose only thought is amusement, and whose only anxiety is how to kill time, how little you know of the deepest and purest pleasure that existence can bring ; how entirely you miss, one and all of you, that supreme

and inexhaustible delight of those who toil and whose toil has become a joy unto themselves!

Julian Temple was, indeed, but an amateur, in that he wrote, in the first instance, not for money, but for love; but who can conscientiously maintain that that is the less worthy object of the two? He wrote mainly because he possessed the power of writing, and had he been a poor man his talent would have rendered him rich; as it was, he added very considerably to his not very munificent income by the labour of his pen. To write, when he was in the vein for it, was a keen and real delight to him; never so much so perhaps as when he knew that there was something within him that troubled his peace of mind, something that had better be scotched and slain and drenched out of him.

This morning his pen flew rapidly over the paper; he was engaged on a biographical essay, and he was keenly in sympathy with his subject. There was something of hero-worship in him, as there is in every man who is worth his salt, and the man whose life he was sketching, was one of those who have done good to the world they have lived in, a good, perhaps, unrecognized during their lifetime, but which posterity is not slow to acknowledge. Temple had all his notes and historical references in front of him, but he did not look at them much; he wrote rapidly and without making corrections, and as he wrote he warmed with his subject, so that his heart became full of the man whose noble life and martyr's death he was recording.

He was perhaps a little annoyed at Cecil's entrance. Interruptions are very disturbing to a writer; the crowding words that are on the tip of the pen have a way of vanishing into space upon the opening of the door, and the ordinary "How d'ye do?" of the visitor seems to scatter the best framed sentences into thin air, whence, alas! they sometimes obstinately refuse to be re-summoned at will. If Julian had not been the kindest-hearted of men he would, perhaps, have displayed his vexation openly; but how is one to shut one's door upon one's best friend? more especially when that friend wears a cloud of wretchedness and misery upon his face. So all he did was to push aside his manuscript and lay down his pen with a sigh.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you horribly," said Cecil; "but really, old man, I want to consult you about something very badly indeed, or I should not have forced myself upon you at this hour."

"No apology is needed, Cecil ; as you know, I am always only too glad to see you. What is it? Are you in trouble?"

"I am horribly disturbed and worried, that is all ; perhaps you will say that is quite enough," answered the other ; he had taken off his overcoat and now he flung himself down in an arm-chair by the window. "But before I tell you more, answer me one question, Julian. Do you remember that night that Major Pryor and I dined with you at the Windham? It was the same evening that I told you about my engagement, as I daresay you will recollect."

Temple nodded.

"And do you remember his talking to us about a fellow called Darley, and your own remarks about him?"

"Perfectly."

"Had you any real reason, Julian, for what you said about that man?"

"My dear boy, what did I say? I almost forget."

"You said that Colonel Vane Darley was an unprincipled libertine. What I want to know is whether you had any real and just cause for those words?"

Temple laughed a little. "This only shows how careful one ought to be about what one says! They were rather strong words certainly ; perhaps I ought not to have used them, for I remember now that old Pryor told us there were certain excuses to be made for Colonel Darley's sins. I must honestly admit, Cecil, that I never knew the man myself, and that I only repeated what I had heard of him. It is a very bad habit ; I believe one ought not to do so. If I was in error, I am willing to retract, and to be more careful in future."

Cecil leant forward suddenly in his chair. "For God's sake do not treat it as a joke, Julian ; it is a matter almost of life and death to me!" he said with a painful agitation.

"My dear Cecil!" and Julian, who had certainly spoken with a pardonable lightness, became as grave as a judge instantly, and remained looking at his friend fixedly and inquiringly, waiting for him to explain himself.

"I have been told something," began Cecil after a moment of silence, and speaking with evident difficulty, "something that makes it imperative for me to find out, if possible, what sort of man this Darley was, and what was his character—I mean with—

with regard to women. For heaven's sake, Temple, tell me the truth: what do you know about him, and what have you heard?"

Both men's faces were earnest enough now, and both were pale. A horrible anxiety filled Cecil Roscoe's searching eyes, whilst a sense of impending calamity made Julian's heart turn faint and cold. Between them both lay an unspoken name, and the fair image of a girl who was dear to them both; and how glad and thankful at that moment was Julian Temple that he could look his friend fairly and straightly in the face.

"I have always heard him badly spoken of in that respect," said Temple, speaking slowly and very seriously; "he was a married man, and he is said to have cruelly compromised a great many women. I can tell you no more than that."

"And his is not a name, you think, that it would do a girl any good to have mentioned in the same breath as her own? It would not be of benefit to her, you would say, to be seen alone in that man's company?—late at night, in public places, for instance?"

"God forbid that any woman dear to you or to me should be so seen or so spoken of," replied Julian, fervently and emphatically. Cecil got up suddenly and walked away to the window, and stood there with his back to the room, looking out of it. Julian was drawing circles on his blotting-pad with his pen.

"My dear Cecil," he said presently in a quieter voice, "this cannot possibly concern you—or—or Miss Forrester; the man is of an older generation altogether; he was, if you recollect Pryor told us, a friend of her father's, a sort of boon companion of his fast young days—it is very improbable that he knew much of his daughters. Miss Nell, at any rate, must have been a child when he went away, for I understood Pryor to say that Darley has not been seen in England for some years past."

Cecil turned round and interrupted him in a rough, choked voice. "You don't know what you are talking about—you don't understand. Wait till I tell you: it *was* Nell; she was quite young, but old enough to know. She was seen with that blackguard late at night, and again four nights later coming back to London with him by train. They were seen at Charing Cross Station late in the evening, and they got into a hansom and drove off together. Of course, the inference is that she had been

away with this man for three days, at a time when her family believed her to be at her grandmother's house in Wimpole Street."

"My God, Cecil! who told you such an awful thing?"

"A woman."

"Ah! I'd have staked my life on its being a woman! and I'd stake it again that it is a lie!—a foul and damnable lie! You don't mean to tell me, Cecil, that you *believe* it?" he cried almost with fury.

Cecil was tramping up and down the room, distractedly sweeping his hands across his forehead and running his fingers through his hair.

"I don't know what to believe, or what to disbelieve. The woman who told me has known her all her life; she saw her distinctly on the two occasions; the last time Nell spoke to her and tried to stop her—called to her by name; she was hanging on to this fellow Darley's arm. She swore to having seen her. I am morally convinced that her story is true; it is impossible to me to doubt such evidence."

"Look here, Cecil, there must be some mistake in all this. Sit down, and let us look this matter in the face," said Julian, surmounting his own intolerable agitation with an almost super-human effort. Cecil obeyed him in so far that he sank down into the chair he had previously occupied and covered his face with his hands. "Now try and answer me quietly. To begin with, who is this woman?"

"She is a Mrs. Hartwood, the widow of a clergyman who used to be the vicar of Marshlands—where they live, you know. She knew all the girls as babies."

"And where did you come across her?"

"Our little neighbour, Ida Vincent, knew her. She used to give her lessons in something or other—I forget what. You remember little Ida? You took her in to dinner at my mother's the other day. A good little thing, rather dull and stupid; but my mother is fond of her, and naturally she takes an interest in my engagement. Well, it seems she sometimes goes out of kindness to visit this Mrs. Hartwood, who is poor, and supports herself by teaching—what they call a decayed gentlewoman, you know—and in the course of conversation the Forresters' name was casually mentioned, and something was said by her

about the girls, about Nell in particular, that frightened Ida. She seems to have been dreadfully distressed and upset by what Mrs. Hartwood let fall, quite unconsciously, I believe—and she did not know in the least what she ought to do. At last it seemed to her to be her duty to tell some one, and she told my aunt.”

“Mrs. Torrens. I think you said that she was very angry at your engagement, did you not?”

“Yes, that is true. Aunt Torrens is not an amiable person, and she has said a great many disagreeable things, but neither she nor my mother are pleased at my engagement, and I am not altogether surprised at it; it is quite natural that they should object to the connection.”

“No one could possibly object to her—to Miss Nell herself,” said Temple a little warmly; “but go on. What did Mrs. Torrens do?”

“She went to see this Mrs. Hartwood and wormed the story out of her; that was yesterday. My aunt said nothing to me, but this morning, just as I was leaving the house, she asked me to come into the morning-room. I found Mrs. Hartwood sitting in front of the fire, and my mother in tears by her side. Mrs. Torrens told the woman to repeat her story to me, which she proceeded to do. I assure you when she began I had not the faintest idea what she was talking about; I thought at first that she was some begging woman whom they were interested in, and that they wanted to get me to give her some money. Even when she mentioned the name of Forrester, and said that she had lived in the same village in Fenshire for years, I could not understand what she was driving at; I thought she was merely talking about them in order to establish a claim on my charity. You may imagine, Julian, what I felt when I began to gather what it was all leading up to; when the woman began to speak about a sacred duty which she owed to the cause of morality, of a secret which had lain untold in her heart for years, and which nothing but a sense of right now induced her to divulge; and then she spoke of Nell, and of what she had seen. Julian, I would not live through those first few awful moments again for anything on earth. I—I—am afraid I made a fool of myself; I believe I fainted.”

“My dear Cecil,” and Temple, despite his utmost efforts, could

not keep a little angry impatience out of his voice, "it is impossible that you can accept this inconceivable slander—the gossip, no doubt, of an ill-natured woman. What proof can the woman give of such a thing being true? Can anybody corroborate her story?"

"She says her husband was with her, but he is dead. What am I to do, Julian?"

"Do!" cried Temple, hotly and indignantly; "do what every generous and honourable instinct within you ought to prompt you to do—refuse to believe this abominable story. Your heart must surely tell you that it is a lie; treat it as such, and dismiss it from your mind altogether; and, above all, if you value the woman you love, do not, for God's sake, sully her ears and outrage her heart by speaking to her about it."

Cecil rose once more from his seat and paced down the room slowly, his hands clasped behind him, his face bent towards the ground in gloomy abstraction; then he came back and stood by the table; he was very pale, and he looked almost haggard with grief, but the lips were set coldly and hardly.

"I cannot dismiss it in that way, Julian; this matter must be sifted thoroughly; remember that Nell's character has been completely taken away to my mother and my aunt. I owe it to them as well as to myself to investigate this woman's statements thoroughly. Considering all the facts bearing upon the case, I am sure you will see that it is my duty to do so. Remember the evil name borne by these Forresters—the story of the mother, the unsatisfactory character of the father—why, I don't mind telling you that he has already borrowed a considerable sum of money from me, which I have not the faintest expectation of ever seeing back; then the way those girls have been brought up—without principles, without religion! Oh, it all comes back upon me now with a terrible significance, I assure you; all these things that have been dinned into my ears on every side ever since the commencement of my engagement. And then, if this man Darley, who had not apparently a shred of reputation, got hold of a young girl brought up as she had been, what more likely than that he was able to demoralize her completely? What else could you possibly expect? The pieces of the story fit into each other all too well for me to put it aside, as you suggest, as mere idle and groundless gossip."

"And do you mean to tell me, then, that you are going to acquiesce in this cruel slander against the girl you love?"

"God forbid. I am not going to acquiesce in it if I can possibly prove it to be false, and that is why I have come to you. I want you to help me, Julian."

Then Julian became angry in downright earnest—so angry that Cecil was a little bit surprised and puzzled, not understanding those secret and deep-seated forces which were moving him to anger.

"I will have nothing to do with it; nothing," he said, with agitation. "Do you suppose I would move a finger to bring shame and disgrace upon a girl like that? Why, I'd stake my very life upon her goodness! I don't want anybody to tell me anything about her. I can see for myself what she is." And then he thought about that walk in the darkness and the wind, with the slender swaying figure that leant upon his arm, and the lovely candid eyes that had looked up into his under the fitful moonlight, and he remembered all the sweet thoughts and words that had flashed from her soul into his own. How could he suppose for one moment that this girl was not what she seemed to be, pure and honest and good? The bare possibility of a doubt of her made him recoil with horror and dismay. And yet, here was Cecil, who should have felt all this a thousand times more, standing opposite him discussing the merits and demerits of the case like a dispassionate looker-on! It was intolerable—inconceivable! "I would not have believed it of you, Cecil," he said hotly.

"My dear fellow, if your whole future life depended upon it, as mine does, I think you would look at it in a different light. I want you to be my friend and stand by me, Julian. Your very faith in Nell is a help and a comfort to me, and I pray God that your judgment of her may be correct. Look here, I have made up my mind to go up to Wimpole Street and see the grandmother, and I want you to come with me."

"Now?"

"Yes, now; this very moment. It is certain that that old woman knows if there was anything wrong, if only we can make her speak, and I want some one to be a witness to what she says, and you will not be the friend I take you for if you do not stand by me.'

"Of course I will come, if you wish it," Julian answered reluctantly. And then he got up and rang the bell for his coat and hat.

"Cecil," he said, turning suddenly to him whilst his man had gone to fetch his things and to call a hansom, "if—if—this story should be true, do you mean that you would not forgive her—that you would break off your engagement?"

Cecil made no answer, for the servant opened the door at that moment to tell them that the hansom was waiting; but when they were seated in the cab, on the way to Wimpole Street, he spoke at last after a long silence.

"It is you yourself, Julian, who have often said to me that honour comes before love. If this story has but the semblance of truth in it, and if this man of evil reputation has compromised Nell Forrester and damaged her good name, then I owe it to myself and to my dear mother, who is a good and religious woman, not to bring to her as a daughter one who is not absolutely stainless in her antecedents. If she really knew this fellow so intimately that she went about with him late at night alone, it is quite enough for me, even although she may be actually innocent of sin. I shall not make her my wife."

And Julian Temple held his tongue and answered him not a word, lest his indignation and wrath should betray him into a confession of his own unlucky love.

(To be continued.)

The Crusades.

By CHARLOTTE A. PRICE.

PART II.

IN May, 1097, the holy legions overspread the plains of Nicæa, and, if early writers can be credited, seven hundred thousand was the number of soldiers and pilgrims gathered there. It is impossible to describe the nature of the military array ; but we can discern that there were one hundred thousand horsemen clad in mail.

There were two sorts of mail armour, scale mail and chain mail. The scales were sewn on a lining of cloth or leather ; but the mail meshes were connected together like links of a chain, and were not attached to anything ; the whole exhibiting a kind of net-work, of which, in some instances, the meshes were circular, with every iron link separately riveted. The chain mail and the scale mail were used sometimes separately, and at other times conjointly.

The hauberk was a complete covering of double chain mail from head to foot. It consisted of a hood joined to a jacket, with sleeves, breeches, stockings and shoes, to which were added gloves or gauntlets of the same construction. It was girt round the body with a strap, called a baltens. Some hauberks opened before like a modern coat ; others were closed like a shirt. Only knights, and those not of the poorest sort, might wear the hauberk. The squire might wear the coat or shirt of mail simply, without the hood, sleeves, or hose of mail.

A garment, called a gambeson, was worn by soldiers. It was a sort of doublet, or waistcoat, composed of many folds of linen stuffed with cotton, wool or hair, quilted and commonly covered with leather. Although it was chiefly worn under the coat of mail, to protect the body from being bruised by the strokes of the sword or lance, it was occasionally used as a surcoat, and richly ornamented.

Mail armour was in general wear during all the Crusades. In France, at the close of the thirteenth century, it was succeeded by plate armour, or large plates of solid iron, fitted to the various parts of the form. Soldiers had for a long time been making approaches to this complete casing of steel. The gorget, or

throat-piece, the knee-pieces, and the breast-iron, had for years been in use. When plate armour was in fashion, the knight carried a dagger, wherewith he might kill his dismounted and recumbent antagonist; who, in consequence of his iron incasement, could only feel the shock, but not the sharpness, of a lance. The dagger was called *la miséricorde*, because the time of its display was the moment when the worsted cavalier cried for mercy.

Mail armour stood its ground longer in England than in France. It was more or less in custom from the time of the Norman conquest till the fifteenth century. Henry IV. was the last monarch that wore it. It is evident that there was some difference of material or fabric between the splendid head-pieces which were worn and the coat of mail. The helmet had often what is called a nasal, or piece of iron descending to the extremity of the nose. In the course of time the weapons of offence were made larger and more powerful, and the defensive armour became stronger and more complete. Visors and bevers were introduced. The visor, or vintail, was a sort of grating to see through, and the wearer could raise or lower it at pleasure. The other addition was also a movable piece of iron, and called a bever, from *bouveau*, a drinker, or from the Italian *bevere*, to drink. The simple skull-cap became a heavy helmet, variously ornamented with crests and other military and armorial distinctions. The monumental effigy of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, is the first in England whose helmet is surmounted by a crest.

Armorial bearings, emblazoned on the surcoat, are unquestionably of older date than the Crusades; they were first used in tournaments in the tenth century, and the right to wear them was primarily restrained to gentlemen who displayed their skill in military exercises. Honorary distinctions of every sort became common in the Crusades and other wars of the middle ages. It seems fair to conclude that many of the barbarous terms of heraldry were adopted by the Christians from circumstances connected with their Asiatic expeditions.

According to the customs of chivalry, such warriors as were knights were attended by their squires, who carried their lances, their golden and ornamented shields, and led the fiery steeds on which the cavaliers rode during the battle. The armour-bearer of a knight is called a valet in old writings, and the term valetton, varleton, and valet was frequently synonymous with that of

esquire. Their education was long and severe ; at seven years old the noble children were usually removed from their father's house to the court of a governor, who taught them the first articles of religion, respect and reverence to their lords and superiors, and initiated them in the ceremonies of a court. Their office was to carve, to wait at table, and to perform other duties which were not then considered as humiliating. At their leisure hours they learned to dance and to play upon the harp ; were instructed in hunting, falconry and fishing ; and in wrestling, tilting with spears, &c. At fourteen the page became an esquire and began the course of more laborious exercises. To vault on a horse in heavy armour, to scale walls and spring over ditches with the same incumbrance, &c., were necessary preliminaries to the reception of knighthood, which was usually conferred at twenty-one years of age. The squire could not eat at the same table with the cavalier, and if he dared to strike a knight he was punished with the loss of his hand.

The number of men-at-arms and archers which constituted the complete equipment of a lance, varied in different times and countries. It was seldom less than three, or perhaps more than six. They bore the standard and were accoutred lighter than their chief. The offensive weapons of the cavalry were iron maces, lances and swords. The bow was the principal weapon of the foot soldiers, who formed the first line of the army and discharged flights of shafts until the heavily-armed troops engaged. The cross-bow as well as the long-bow was in use, and was of immemorial antiquity, but the spirit of chivalry was opposed to a weapon which in the exercise required no skill, and it was held in the same contempt as poisoned arrows were by the Crusaders. The horse on which the knight rode during the march was called a "palefroi," and the war-horse, generally a large and heavy animal, was named a "destrier," perhaps because it was common to lead him by the hand till the hour of battle.

The ensigns and standards of the knights were very handsome. A square flag, or banner, was the distinction of knights banneret, or the higher classes of nobility, who were cavaliers. Such knights as were not dukes, counts or barons, or distinguished for their wealth, carried only the pointed pennon. When a simple knight was made a banneret, the sovereign prince, or the commander of his armies, unrolled the emblazoned pennon, cut

off the end and delivered the square flag to the knight, who had claimed the honour in consequence of the nobility of his birth, the services of his ancestors, &c., and who declared that he had a sufficiency of vassals to support the dignity. Sovereign princes had both banner and pennon. Bannerets had a war-cry, but other knights had not. The former were called rich men, the latter poor men. Knights of every rank frequently adorned the top of their lances with a small flag, called a bandroll, or pencil.

The city of Nicæa, the capital of Bithynia, was situated on a fertile plain, and owed its strength more to art than to nature. It was defended by double walls of immense thickness, and the attacking enemy could be repulsed from more than three hundred and fifty towers, which stood at frequent intervals. The Crusaders erected wooden towers, which were called belfrois or belfries, and which were so often used in the middle ages. Their summit, as well as other parts or stories of them, were occupied by armed men. They were usually moved on four wheels, and to prevent injury from the enemy's fire, they were covered with boiled horse or bullock skins. Having impelled these towers against the stone towers of the city, the engagements became hand to hand between the besieged and the besiegers.

The Crusaders also made use of the machine called a Fox, which was probably of the same class of engines as the Cats. The Cats were in the form of a covered gallery, fastened to the walls to afford shelter to the sappers. They were also made to fill up the ditches, in order that the belfries might be brought near the walls. The carnage was great on both sides, but the Emperor Alexius having by stratagem obtained entrance into the city, the imperial trumpets were sounded, his banners were hung over the walls, and the city proclaimed to be his. The pride of the Crusaders was wounded at this artifice of their ally, but Alexius was bountiful in his presents to all classes; and the generals, thinking of greater objects, dissembled their disgust and endeavoured to stifle the anger of their troops.

Seven weeks were consumed in the siege of Nicæa, and the number of the Christians that died, or, in the language of the times, received martyrdom, was considerable.

On July 3rd, 1097, the Crusaders commenced their march through Asia Minor, and took the road to Antioch. Soon after occurred the battle of Doryleum. At first the Turks were

successful, and pressed forward to the camp of the Crusaders, where they used their swords without mercy. Mothers and their children were killed, and neither priests nor old men were spared. Some of the matrons and damsels of quality preferred Turkish slavery and its accompaniments to a glorious death. They dressed themselves in their most sumptuous robes, exhibited all their charms, and threw themselves at the feet of their conquerors.

The cries of the dying reached the ears of Bohemond, who, leaving the command to Robert of Normandy, rushed towards the tents and scattered the enemy. The combat was renewed with tenfold vigour. The Norman chieftain fought with all the valour which belonged to his family. He rallied the alarmed troops by those words of courage, "*Deus id vult!*" and with his standard in his hand, he darted into the midst of the Turks. Godfrey, the Count of Vermandois, Adhemar and Raymond, soon increased the force, and their heavy charge was irresistible. The Moslems fled on every side, and the Christians pursued them for miles, and then, as devout as joyful, returned to their old positions singing hymns to God. The next morning they performed the melancholy task of separating their fallen companions from the corpses of the enemy, and the holy cross on the shoulder was a well-known distinction. They hastened to despoil the bodies of the Turks; and who can tell the quantity of gold and silver and clothes which they found? The horses, mules, camels and asses could not be numbered. The poor instantly became rich, and the naked were clothed.

The Crusaders now had a distressing march through Phrygia—a land which their enemies had laid waste. The soil was dry and sterile, and Europeans could ill endure the heat of a Phrygian summer. In one day five hundred people died. Many of the horses perished. "The baggage," says an eye-witness, "was placed on the backs of goats, hogs and dogs. These animals too died of thirst; and neither the dogs of the chase nor the falcons could hunt the prey with which the woods abounded."

When the Crusaders passed the Phrygian mountains and deserts, they reached a country where the very means of life were fatal to many. They threw themselves without caution into the first river that presented itself, and nature could not support the transition from want to satiety.

While a few ambitious and courageous soldiers under Tancred

and Baldwin were triumphing over an inert population, and founding a European state in Mesopotamia, the general force of the Crusaders was advancing towards the capital of Syria. Every measure announced the growing importance of the expedition. Orders were issued forbidding individuals to quit the ranks without leave of their generals, and the Duke of Normandy was sent before to remove the difficulties of the march. The river Orontes was one of the barriers of the city, and possession of the iron bridge was necessary for an attacking army. This bridge was of nine stone arches, and from the circumstance of its gates being covered with iron plates, it received the title of the "Iron Bridge." Whether the assurances of Adhemar to the Normans, that God was on that day fighting with them, inspired the soldiers to one great effort, or whether the arrival of Godfrey appalled the Turks, is not known; but in fact, the gates of the bridge soon were in the hands of the Latins, and all the army passed. The next morning they encamped before Antioch, and the chiefs bound themselves by an oath not to desist from the siege of that city until it should be taken by force or stratagem.

The horrors of war now began. The Crusaders hurled enormous stones, and impelled their battering-rams against the walls. But Antioch had in former ages resisted many a vigorous attack, and the hand of Time had spared it. The usual warlike machines proved ineffectual, and at a cost of much invention and labour, they erected a new one in the shape of a tower, and filled it with troops. The soldiers of Raymond wheeled it to the gate, but the showers of arrows from the Turks destroyed the assailants, and the besieged made a sortie at the same time and set fire to the artificial tower, which was soon reduced to ashes. Famine now afflicted the army and many of the Crusaders deserted. They were in that state of sullen, savage desperation which the extreme of misery often produces. The dying and the dead were spectacles familiar to their eyes. Five months had elapsed since the commencement of the siege, and various were the calamities which the brave soldiers had survived. Many fierce battles raged between them and the Mohammedans, both sides performing prodigies of valour. Familiarity with scenes of horror had extinguished every feeling of humanity. The Christians severed the heads from the trunks of fifteen hundred

Turks, and exposed them on pikes to the besieged. The defence became every day more feeble, and at last, by the treachery of a Turkish spy, Antioch, after seven months' siege, was entered by the Crusaders. They seized the towers and slew the guards. A postern was then opened, and the whole army entered the city with all the ferocity of religious zealots. The banner of Bohemond was hoisted on a principal eminence; the trumpets proclaimed the triumph of the Christians, and with the affirmation, "*Deus id vult!*" they commenced their butchery of the sleeping inhabitants. The dignity of age, the helplessness of youth, and the beauty of women, were alike disregarded by these Latin savages. Houses were no sanctuaries, and the sight of a mosque added fresh fuel to the flame of their cruelty. The number of Mohammedans massacred on this night was at least ten thousand.

But the new citizens were called to war again a very few days after they had achieved their conquest. The Emperor of Persia summoned all his hosts to scourge the enemies of the Prophet. They pitched their tents round the fallen capital and blockaded the Christians. A few days of luxury had consumed all the provisions stored up in Antioch, and when the Persians appeared, the Crusaders sought in vain to accumulate fresh supplies from the devastated vicinity. The sword was without and famine was within. All the distresses that the Christians had suffered before the walls were nothing when compared with the horrors they endured now that they were in possession of the city. So long as there was any food for the horses, the blood of these animals was drunk, and then their flesh was devoured. Vegetables the most nauseous were greedily eaten; they boiled the leaves of trees; the skins of animals and even the leather of the military accoutrements were stewed for food. All ranks felt the distress alike, and even Godfrey was at last left without horses or money. According to one writer, however, the poor creatures did not cease to cry, "Not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be the praise," or to reflect without pleasure, that the Lord chastens every son whom he receives. A great many soldiers escaped over the walls; but the indignant Archbishop of Tyre exclaims that "he remembers not many of them, for as their names are struck out of the holy volume of life, they cannot be inserted in his book." The fugitives let themselves over the walls of

Antioch by means of ropes. Baldric tells us that their hands were dreadfully excoriated—not an unlikely circumstance, and the knowledge of it must have been grateful to their indignant, and perhaps envious brethren, who also amused themselves with calling them the rope-dancers.

The chief leaders of the Crusades swore that they would never desert each other ; and Tancred showed his fanaticism, or courage, in the expression that “he would not abandon the journey to Jerusalem, so long as sixty soldiers were in his train.” Peter the Hermit was sent to the Persians to desire them to quit a country which, by the beneficence of St. Peter, belonged to the faithful. But the ministers of the Crusades were contemptuously dismissed, and they made a speedy return to the camp.

The soldiers now prepared to chastise the enemies of God. They polished their shields and sharpened their swords. What few possessions they had left, they freely gave to each other ; and their horses—only two hundred—were allowed a double portion of provender. Temporal cares did not possess them wholly. They sang hymns, they prayed, made religious processions, and received the sacrament of the Holy Supper. Every one felt glad that he was the man of God, and that, assisted by the lance of his Saviour, he should discomfit his foes.

The next day all the troops, excepting a few who were left to watch the citadel, quitted Antioch, and formed in battle array on the plain before the city. The van was preceded by the priests and monks, with crucifixes in their hands, praying aloud for the protection of God. Every event was turned into a favourable omen, and even the morning dew, scented with the perfume of roses, was supposed to be a special favour from heaven.

The army marched in twelve divisions, in honour of the twelve Apostles. The Bishop of Puy, clothed in armour and bearing the sacred lance—supposed to be the very one which had pierced the side of Christ—exhorted the champions of the cross to fight that day as brothers in Christ, as the sons of God. The army shouted their approbation and assent ; they opposed no stratagem to the manœuvres of the Turks, but the battle was fought man to man, lance to lance. In a perilous moment human figures, clad in white armour and riding on white horses, appeared on the summit of the neighbouring hills, and the people distinguished the martyrs St. George, Maurice and

Theodore. The superstitious Adhemar ran through the ranks, exclaiming, "Behold, soldiers, the succour which God has promised you!" The men answered with the cry, "*Deus id vult!*" and bore down upon the Saracens, who, terrified at their unexpected vigour, threw away their arms and fled.

Kerboga could not rally his troops, or save the Turkish women and children from murder, or his camp from spoliation. The booty was so great that every one of the conquerors became in a moment far richer than when he assumed the cross; and there fell to the share of Bohemond the splendid tent of Kerboga, which, like the one sent by Harun al Raschid to Charlemagne, could, it is said, contain two thousand men, was divided into streets like a town, and fortified with towers. The citadel of Antioch followed the fate of the covering army, and surrendered; the chief and three hundred of the garrison embraced Christianity. The churches were restored to their pristine dignity, and clergy were appointed for the solemnization of religious rites. The public spoil furnished gold and silver, materials for crosses, candelabras, and other ornaments of the church, and the Crusaders, filled with gratitude to Almighty God for their deliverance, took heed not to fail in zeal for the cause of religion.

The victorious people were clamorous to proceed immediately to Jerusalem and accomplish their vow; but the chiefs resolved to give the wounded soldiers three months' rest; also, the hot sun had already dried most of the springs, and the new deserts which they had to pass through could not be foreseen without dread. Discord now spread among the princes; public justice did not restrain private injury, and the will of man was his only law. Pestilence spread its ravages with such swift strokes, that in a few months it destroyed more than one hundred thousand persons. Of all its victims, none was so deeply lamented as Adhemar of Puy. It is said that "he had every virtue under heaven, and was, besides, eloquent, facetious, and all things to all men."

During the sojourn of the Crusaders at Antioch they attacked the city of Marra, and having learnt nothing from experience, sat down to the siege of that place with no store of provisions. They were soon reduced to their old resource of dogs' flesh, and are also said by some ancient writers to have eaten human carcases. The cruelty of these savages was never more marked than when they conquered Marra, for they used their swords so

freely that streams of blood flowed through the streets, and many of the inhabitants were guilty of self-slaughter, in order to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy.

On March 1st, 1099, the Crusaders left Antioch. The Emir of Tripoli attempted to oppose the torrent of invaders, but he was soon compelled to deprecate their vengeance ; and though Raymond wished that the town should be sacked, yet mercy prevailed in the minds of the other generals, and they were contented with large supplies of provisions, the liberation of three hundred Christian slaves, and the payment of fifteen thousand pieces of gold. It was near Tripoli the Crusaders found the sugar-cane. The account of it is curious, inasmuch as it is the first on record which any European ever made concerning a plant, the cultivation of which forms so large a chapter in the annals of human misery. An old writer says, "It is grown with great labour. When ripe they pound it, strain off the juice, and keep it in vessels till the process of coagulation is complete, and hardens in appearance like salt or snow. They eat it scraped or mixed with bread, or dissolved in water."

The soldiers crossed the plain of Beritus, went through the country of Sidon, and when they arrived at Jaffa, they left their maritime route, and marched to and halted at Ramula, which was only sixteen miles from Jerusalem. The Saracens fled from the town ; and the Crusaders, in their great joy at the possession of its riches, vowed that they would raise a bishopric to the honour of St. George, whose canonized bones reposed there, but whose virtuous spirit had procured them the favour of heaven. On the third day after their arrival at Ramula, the soldiers and people took the road to Jerusalem, and soon reached the town which, in the history of its sacred and Roman days, had assumed the different names of Emmaus and Nicopolis. The holy city was then in view ; every heart glowed with rapture ; every eye was bathed in tears. The word Jerusalem was repeated in tumultuous wonder by a thousand tongues, and those who first beheld the blessed spot, called their friends to witness the glorious sight. "Some prostrate, some kneeling, some weeping ; all had much ado to manage so great a gladness." All pains were forgotten ; a moment's happiness outweighed years of sorrow. The soldier became in an instant the simple pilgrim ; his lance and sword were thrown aside ; he wept over the ground which, he said, his

Saviour had wept over ; and it was only with naked feet that he could worthily approach the seat of man's redemption. Of the millions of fanatics who had vowed to rescue Jerusalem from the hands of the infidels, forty thousand only encamped before its walls, and of these remnants of the champions of the cross, twenty-one thousand five hundred were soldiers—twenty thousand foot and fifteen hundred cavalry.

At the time of this Crusade Jerusalem was nearly the figure of a square. The garrison consisted of forty thousand regularly-appointed Egyptian troops, commanded by Istakar. The besiegers, on the fifth day of this encampment, made a furious attack on the city. Their bucklers were their only defence against the storm of arrows and fireballs from the besieged. Their impetuous valour carried them through the barbican, and they reached the foot of the city walls ; had they been possessed of a few military engines, Jerusalem would have been taken. But they fought with their naked swords alone, and the Turks soon cleared the ramparts of their invaders. The Christians then prepared with prudence and wisdom to conduct the siege. The princes resolved that every species of military machine should be erected ; and, assisted by the Italians, they constructed the catapult to assault, the vinea or sow to undermine the walls, and the most happy results were anticipated from these immense movable towers. Each tower had three stories ; the lowest near the ground, the second on a level with the ramparts, and the third was much more elevated. The soldiers on each floor were armed with the sword, the bow and hand mangonel. Hunger had been the great calamity before Antioch, and drought was the scourge in the camp round Jerusalem. Every fountain and receptacle of water had been destroyed by the Emir. The naked stones of the Siloe mocked their wants, and the bed of the Cedron is in summer an unwholesome morass. The people eagerly watched for the appearance of dew ; they dug holes in the ground, and pressed their mouths to the damp clod. Many abstained from food, in the hope of mitigating by hunger the pain of thirst.

When the towers and other works were completed, a day was appointed for a general assault, and all the soldiers were stimulated to exertion by the donation of a piece of money. Religion claimed her dues. Misery had produced disorder and crime, and

the character of the Christian soldiers before Jerusalem had become as immoral as it had been in the long and painful siege of Antioch. Peter the Hermit, and Arnold exhorted the Crusaders to all religious and martial virtues. The soldiers, completely armed, made a holy procession round the walls. The clergy, with naked feet, and bearing images of the cross, led them in the sacred way. On Mount Olivet and Mount Sion they prayed for the aid of heaven in the approaching conflict. The next morning every soldier was prepared for battle; and there was no one who was not resolved either to die for Christ, or restore His city to liberty. The battering rams, the Cats and the towers were impelled against the walls; and the Egyptians met the attack with darts, stones and the Greek fire. The conflict raged throughout the day, but the triumph was with the besieged. The great tower of the Count of Toulouse was much injured; hundreds of men were slain, and, on the approach of darkness, the commanders ordered a retreat.

When the morning arose all was industry and bustle. Every Crusader seemed fresh and fierce; the towers were manned with selected cavaliers. Some mounted the summits and second stories; others were at the bottom, forcing the immense masses. The battering rams, also, were put in motion. The besieged repaired their mural breaches, got ready their fire, their boiling oil, and all the dreadful stores of war. For several hours expectation stood in horror for the issue of the raging conflict. About noon the cause of the western world seemed to totter on the brink of destruction, and the most courageous thought that heaven had deserted its people. At the moment when all appeared lost, a knight was seen on Mount Olivet, waving his glittering shield as a sign to the soldiers that they should rally and return to the charge. Godfrey shouted to his men that St. George was come to their assistance. The Crusaders rallied round their leaders; even the women were to be seen supporting and encouraging their fainting friends. In the space of an hour the barbican was broken down, and Godfrey's tower rested against the inner wall. Changing the duties of general for those of a soldier, the Duke of Lorraine used his bow; Eustace and Baldwin were near him, and fought "like two lions beside another lion."

At the hour when the Saviour of the world had been crucified Godfrey stood as a conqueror on the ramparts of Jerusalem. The

glorious ensign of the cross streamed from the walls. The Turks fought for a while, then fled to their temples, and submitted to their conquerors. Such was the carnage in the Mosque of Omar that the mutilated bodies were hurried by the torrents of blood into the court. Ten thousand people were murdered in this sanctuary. The Christians rode in the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of their horses.

On entering the city, the Duke of Lorraine drew his sword and slew the infidels, in revenge for the Christian blood which had been spilt by the Moslems, and as a punishment for the raileries and outrages to which they had subjected the pilgrims. But having avenged the cause of heaven, Godfrey did not neglect his religious duties. He threw aside his armour, clothed himself in a linen mantle, and, with bare head and naked feet, went to the church of the Sepulchre. The whole city was influenced by one spirit, and "the clamour of thanksgiving was loud enough to have reached the stars." The people vowed to sin no more, and the sick and poor were liberally relieved by the great, who thought themselves sufficiently rich and happy to have lived to see that day.

The last historical mention of Peter the Hermit occurs at this time. The multitude fell at his feet in gratitude for his faithful discharge of his trust, acknowledging that he had excited their piety and inflamed their zeal, and praising God who was glorified in His servant.

Jerusalem was now in the hands of the Crusaders. A Christian kingdom was raised, and the laws, language and manners of Europe were planted in Palestine. On the eighth day after the capture of the holy city the princes assembled for the august purpose of electing a monarch. The rank, family and possessions of the chieftains were known to each other; but private morals and manners are visible only to friends and domestics. Lord Bacon says, "As for the knowledge of men, which is at second hand from reports, men's weakness and faults are best known from their enemies; their virtues and abilities from their friends; their customs and crimes from their servants; their conceits and opinions from their familiar friends, with whom they discourse most. General fame is light, and the opinions conceived by superiors or equals are deceitful, for to such, men are more masked."

Godfrey of Bouillon was considered by his virtues, as well as by his birth, to be the most suitable of all the leaders of the Crusade to be invested with royal honours. The priests conducted him in religious and stately order to the church which covered the tomb of Christ ; but he refused to wear a diadem in a city where his Saviour had worn a crown of thorns, and modestly avowed, that to become the defender and advocate of the Holy Sepulchre was all that he aspired to. Godfrey reigned for the short space of a year. He was only forty years old at the time of his death, and his tomb was not only watered by the tears of his friends, but many Mohammedans wept at his decease, for his gentleness and virtues had conciliated them, and he was greatly lamented. He left no issue.

Godfrey's brother Baldwin succeeded him as king, and the Patriarch poured the oil of consecration on his head in the church of Bethlehem, and crowned him with the royal diadem. In his reign the kingdom of Jerusalem acquired strength and extent. About ten years after his accession he marched his army into Egypt. But the hand of sickness arrested him in the career of his fortune. As he lay dying, one desire alone dominated his mind, and he begged his comrades not to allow his body to lie in Egypt, where it would become a subject of ridicule to the Turks. His weeping friends replied, that in the heat of the season they could scarcely touch, much less carry, a corpse so great a distance ; but Baldwin gave them specific instructions for embalming his body, which would enable them with ease to remove it to Jerusalem. Then, recommending Baldwin de Bourg for his successor, he expired. All the soldiers mourned his death but, after the first violence of grief, they resumed their ordinary appearance, lest the fatal circumstance should become known to, and inspire the enemy with confidence. The army immediately left Egypt, and on reaching Jerusalem the body of the late king was taken to the sepulchre of Godfrey and there interred.

On the very day of Baldwin's funeral the prelates and barons met in council for the choice of a successor. The prince had died without children. The claims of Baldwin de Bourg were allowed to be satisfactory, both on the grounds of his valour and wisdom, and his consanguinity to the late sovereign. He reigned from the year 1118 to 1131. He imitated the piety of Godfrey, and pursued with constancy the politics of his predecessor.

The fourth Latin king was Fulk, Count of Anjou. The Earls of Anjou had often made journeys to Palestine. One of them, many years before the first Crusade, went to Jerusalem, and, compelling two servants by an oath to do whatever he commanded, he was publicly dragged by them, in the sight of the Turks, to the Holy Sepulchre. The servants scourged his naked back, while the old sinner cried aloud, "Lord receive Thy wretched Fulk, Thy perfidious, Thy runagate ; regard my repentant soul, O Lord !" Fulk reigned for fourteen years, and left the state pretty much as he found it ; his conduct as king afforded little matter for praise or blame.

Baldwin III., eldest son of the late king, was only thirteen when he came to the throne, A.D. 1144. In his reign the principality of Edessa, which the Christians had founded, was torn from them, and in consequence a new Crusade was undertaken by the potentates and people of the West. Battles, too numerous to mention, raged during the reigns of all these kings, and the Holy Land was seldom free from hostile inroads. The conduct of the Christians in their warfare with the Mohammedans presents to us some curious particulars of the state of the age. Before every battle the aid of heaven was invoked, and the priests blessed and encouraged the soldiers. The cause of war and religion was dear to all classes of people ; the aged gave their prayers, the weak their tears, while military ardour sustained the spirits of the young and adventurous. On occasions of more than ordinary importance, when the clock of Jerusalem sounded the note of war, fasts were ordained of such superstitious rigour, that children at the breast were not allowed the usual nourishment, and the herds of cattle were driven from their pasturage. It was pretended that a piece of the true cross was found in Jerusalem ; the great deception of the fourth century was revived, and the precious relic was in every engagement the chief incitement to valour.

In the second Crusade, death, famine and disease swept from the world more than four hundred thousand fanatical spirits, and in all these so-called holy wars intolerance and implacability went hand in hand ; the fancied authority of heaven for the infliction of punishment, sharpened and embittered the military character, which was already wild and savagely furious. Both vindictive antipathy and evangelical charity were considered the duties of knighthood ; and he who spared a Moslem was as faithless a

soldier of Christ, as he who plunged his sword into the heart of a fallen and suppliant Christian.

Raymond, Count of Toulouse, who had been one of the guides of the Crusaders through Asia Minor, never abandoned the hope of conquering the city of Tripoli. He, and his Provençals, built a castle near it, which, from the holy character of those who erected it, was called the Castle of the Pilgrims. In his native land, Raymond far exceeded Godfrey in rank and power, but his treachery and ambition gradually lost him the favour of the chiefs; old age came upon him, and he died unlamented on the sea-coast of Palestine in the year 1105.

The Christians mourned the death of Tancred in 1112. His end was that of a brave soldier, for he died of a wound which he received in battle. As he had no children he confided the government of Antioch to his kinsman the Count of Capua.

It was customary to crown the king at Jerusalem, but when the holy city was in the hands of the infidels, then the ceremony took place at Tyre. The king swore to protect religion, to do justice, and to govern the people agreeably to the laws and customs of the realm. In the course of the service he was anointed. Two prelates then presented him with a ring, denoting royalty; a sword, representing justice, for the defence of himself and the holy Church; a crown, the sign of dignity; a sceptre, the mark of power; and an apple, the emblem of the land of the kingdom itself. The prelates and barons cried aloud, "Long live the king," and the king kissed the churchmen. The sacrament of the Holy Communion was administered, and the Patriarch blessed the royal standard. The monarch offered his crown on the altar where our Lord had been offered by Simeon, and afterwards went to the Temple of Solomon, which was the house of the Templars, and took refreshment, and the burgesses of Jerusalem paid homage and attended upon the king.

The laws made for the government of Palestine by the Christians were just and good, according to the spirit of the age. Courts of justice were established, the relations between the nobles and people were judiciously fixed, the rights of women were preserved, but slaves had no rights and no possessions, and were in every respect considered as cattle. A hundred gold besants was the value of a slave, or villain, whether male or female, but the war-horse was worth three hundred besants.

The origin of the "trial by battle" was coeval with the rudest beginnings of society, when all considerations were personal, and revenge was the object of punishment. The Franks carried their warlike customs into Palestine, and the causes which were to be tried in this way were murder, treason, apparent homicide, quarrels respecting a mark of silver or more, improper language from a feudatory to his lord, and of all things which concerned life, members, rights and honour. In civil cases, if the defendant could not invalidate the testimony of the plaintiff's witnesses, he might openly declare him to be false and perjured, and that he would prove him a dead man or recreant in some hour of the day. He then exclaimed, "Behold my gage!" and delivered it on his knees to the lord; the other party did the like, and the lord, on this mutual charge of falsehood, appointed a day for the battle.

In an appeal of murder or of homicide, the battle was fought on the third day; in all other cases on the fortieth, from the time the accusation was made. In cases of the pledge being offered by a knight to a common person, the battle was to be fought on foot; because the appellant ought to follow the defendant in his law, and it would be unjust for a cavalier to fight on horseback a man who was on foot.

The knights in appeals of murder and homicide were to fight on foot. Their heads were to be shaven, their skull-caps were to be taken off; they were to have red buskins and a red coat of arms, or garment reaching to the knees. Their bucklers were to be large, with eyelet holes. Their weapons were one lance and two swords, one of which was attached to the side, and the other to the shields. The combatants were placed in their stations, and proclamation was made that no one should assist them. The keepers of the court watched the battle. If either party uttered the word "recreant," the other was called upon to pause, and the recreant knight was taken to the lord and immediately hanged. If death, and not the call for mercy, was the consequence of the combat, still the punishment of hanging was inflicted.

A Modern Hedonist.

By L. E. TIDDEMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THERE were roses in the parson's garden—roses that clustered and clambered, and filled the air with fragrance ; there were old and spreading trees also, and beneath the oldest and most spreading sat the Rev. Benedict Easyman. A bamboo table was beside him, upon which stood a decanter of fine old port, two fragile wine-glasses and a box of cigars. He looked at these, but refrained from touching them ; a light breeze from the south lifted a lock of soft grey hair from his forehead caressingly, as a woman touches with her fingers.

Nature had been kindly to the Reverend Benedict Easyman. She had sculptured his features delicately, moulded the massive chin with due regard to the laws of beauty, set the large, clear eyes just where they should be—neither too forward nor too backward—and curved the well-cut lips in so cunning a fashion that they appeared to wear a perpetual smile of benevolence. His complexion was soft, tinted with colour, and without blemish, in spite of his sixty years ; his white hands, tapered at the finger ends, lay folded upon his knee. From time to time he raised his eyes and glanced in the direction of a flight of broad stone steps leading into the garden. There were flower-pots ranged on either side, filled with scarlet geraniums in full bloom, a purple clematis covered the wall, and starry jessamine blossoms exhaled perfume. The lawn was smooth as velvet, and of a green restful to the eye ; at the further end a fountain splashed rhythmically.

Yet the parson must needs watch ; the large Newfoundland dog at his feet watched also.

"He is always late," said his master. "The same thing happens over and over again, and if I reproach him he will tell me that his time is not his own. Not his own, forsooth ! The Bible tells us that we are to love our neighbour as ourself, but not better—not better !"

He sat with the points of his fingers pressed together, and his chin resting on them. Presently—for the time passed but slowly—he poured himself out a glass of wine, lit a cigar, and smoked with an enjoyment marred by a touch of peevishness. A bird sang on a branch above him, not too loud to disturb the train of his thoughts, but withal very sweetly.

“Always the same,” he said again; “always——”

He glanced once more in the direction of the house, and saw a figure descending the steps rapidly, almost at a run.

“I am afraid I am rather late,” observed the new arrival. “I said seven, did I not?”

“Of course you did; and it is eight o'clock already.”

The parson spoke peevishly, and held out his watch for inspection. His friend smiled and glanced at his own.

“Seven fifty-seven,” he rejoined. “Give me the benefit of those three minutes, old friend.”

He took a seat and leant back for a moment; but Don the lame Newfoundland, fawned about him, and he roused himself to return the animal's caresses.

“Down, Don—down,” cried his master impatiently.

“Let him be,” retorted the other; “allow for a little natural excitement. He hasn't seen me for a fortnight.”

“Nor have I! What have you been doing with yourself?”

“Attending to my professional duties as conscientiously as usual. There is a deal of sickness about. The weather is unusually warm, and the sanitary condition of our picturesque village conducive to typhus fever. There are several cases already—I have just come from one.”

The Reverend Benedict Easyman withdrew the skirts of his clerical coat from contact with his neighbour. Dr. John Herrick smiled in whimsical recognition of the action; there was not much that escaped his observation.

“I wish I could really frighten you landlords,” he said; “I have tried it on with the squire, and I think he is getting a trifle alarmed. By the time he has roused himself to action, circumstances will have occurred to make him more so—that is, unless I am greatly mistaken. His property is in a disgraceful state. So is yours.”

The speaker turned abruptly and fixed his eyes upon his host. They were keen grey eyes, with dark lashes. He had a habit of

contracting them as though to focus objects, yet his sight was unusually good. His was a rugged face, and far from handsome. Although only forty years of age, the dark hair upon his temples was growing thin. He was light of figure but somewhat angular, and singularly alert and active in gait and gesture. Intelligence and an extreme earnestness of expression relieved his face from positive plainness. Only the ignorant and prejudiced used this term when speaking of him, unless we except those who had tried to gain his favour and failed. However, criticism anent his personal appearance did not affect John Herrick, although upon other points he was keenly sensitive to praise or blame.

"I am not going to talk about my property to-night, Herrick," replied Easyman; "in point of fact I should, were I not a parson, be inclined to say, 'Hang my property.' I have been busy all day, troubled by no end of small worries—mere pin-pricks to the 'plain man in the street,' but very like sword-thrusts to an intensely sensitive nature like mine. My nerves are highly strung—unfortunately so, I may say."

The doctor honoured him with a swift glance, half-amused, half-critical; then said, with apparent irrelevance:

"That coachman of yours isn't fit for his work; he ought to lay up for a fortnight at the least."

"I can't manage that just yet." Mr. Easyman's mouth was set, his voice had a touch of harshness.

"Well," rejoined the other sharply, "I merely gave my professional opinion. You may take it for what it is worth."

"How much is that?"

"Opinions differ. One thing is certain, however; if a man consults me he should do as I suggest."

"I have not consulted you, my friend."

"Humphreys has."

"Then let Humphreys do as you bid."

"You say that you cannot spare him at present."

"Undoubtedly I cannot, but I can supply his place."

"That is not the point. Humphreys has a wife and family."

"More fool he. These poor folk are ridiculously improvident. It was against my advice that he took upon himself such a responsibility at so early an age. I talked to him on the subject for an hour by the clock."

"Dry work. You might have talked for two or three hours by

the clock, and I don't suppose that it would have made any difference."

"Why not?"

"Because, like the rest of us, Humphreys is human."

"Fiddlesticks! Have a glass of wine?"

He filled his own for the second time.

Dr. Herrick rose, paced the garden once or twice somewhat impatiently, Don at his heels, and returning, resumed his seat.

The Reverend Benedict Easyman, who had evidently been cogitating during his absence, addressed him at once in the studied tones to which his flock was so well accustomed.

"My dear friend," he said, "it would be impossible for me or any other to deny that you are the most unselfish of men, but do you not ride your hobby too hard? What have you been doing to-day, for example?"

"My day began at one this morning. I was sent for to Polwhelly."

"An important patient?"

"A miner's child down with the croup."

"And you went with that cough on you, fresh from your warm bed, to face the cool morning air."

"Naturally."

"Do you realize the danger that you ran?"

"I believe so."

"And you are willing to risk your life for the child? Yet you make no profession of religion. How long is it since you attended worship at St. Martin's?"

Dr. Herrick smiled.

"I pulled the little thing through," said he, "bless its heart!"

"Since then, what have you been doing?"

"Working like a nigger; just got time for a snack of lunch, that's all. I hope there's something good for supper."

"Yes; I have foregone my late dinner for your sake. Cook has done her best for the same reason."

"So much the better. I am as hungry as a hunter."

The dark face was aglow with a pleasant smile. Don crept closer. Mr. Easyman laid his hand on his friend's sleeve. He could not have accounted for the sudden feeling of enthusiastic admiration that stirred him from his wonted calm.

"God bless you!" he said. "You are a sublimely unselfish man."

"No, no."

The doctor was on the defensive at once. The air of *bonhomie* had forsaken him.

"Don't say that," he protested. "I am sick of being called unselfish—in fact, I cannot submit to hearing it said. Mine is only a refined form of selfishness, I assure you."

"How do you make that out?"

"Man, I am a Hedonist—a Hedonist pure and simple. My aim is pleasure. I reminded myself of that as I rode home from Polwhelly this morning. The time and the season caused me to reflect, as I have so often done before under similar circumstances. At first there was a glow of satisfaction within me. I said to myself in a congratulatory way: 'You are a fine fellow, John Herrick, a noble fellow. There isn't one man in a hundred who would do as you have done. There was no necessity for you to turn out at one o'clock for this case. You were only requested to go early in the morning. Whatever had happened, *you* would not have been to blame. Besides, the child was only a club patient. There is no mistake about it; you are a noble fellow.'"

"Well?"

The Reverend Benedict Easyman supplied the interrogative, using it as a means of forcing his companion to further speech; for John Herrick had paused crestfallen in the midst of his self-analysis.

"Well," he continued, "I had to look deeper. I had to ask myself *why* I went. I found that I went to please myself—for no higher motive, I assure you."

"To please yourself! Had you not been out the whole of the preceding night? Were you not as tired as a dog?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then, how did you please yourself?"

"The child would have died if I had not gone; and if the child had died I should have been utterly miserable. Yes, old friend, this was my true motive; there is no getting out of it."

"And when you labour for the poor outside your profession—when you give them the time and the money you can so ill spare—what, then? Are not your motives pure?"

"They are purely selfish, though they look well enough at first sight. It makes *me* uncomfortable to see *them* uncomfortable, and so I work and give away as much as I am able,

although, perhaps, not quite so much as I should like. I am a Hedonist, Easyman—neither more nor less.”

Life and light had left the speaker's face. His eyes were wan and weary. Yet he stooped to examine Don's leg, and found leisure to rub it gently.

“The poor old dog is getting rheumatic. I don't like the place where you put his kennel. Couldn't you shift it a bit? Better still, couldn't he sleep indoors?”

“The maids wouldn't care for that. I wish I could get rid of the dog; he is too old to be of any use.”

Don's head was on Herrick's knee; the faithful, loving eyes looked into his.

“I should like to have the old fellow,” he said, “if you are willing to part with him. Ten to one that he would be himself again soon with proper care. Confide him to your medical man.”

“With pleasure; that will be preferable to having him shot, and one can't keep a crippled animal. It would be far more Christian to destroy him.”

John Herrick darted a quick glance at his friend, then rose and again paced the garden, this time more impatiently. The dog limped after him.

“I should have thought you had walked enough; you look thoroughly done up,” said his friend, joining him, “and you have not taken any wine.”

He held out a well-filled glass. John Herrick was about to accept it mechanically, then, with an amused laugh, hearty enough to be contagious, exclaimed:

“I was well nigh forgetting that I had sworn off.”

“Sworn off! You, who have drunk wine all your life! For heaven's sake, why? Is it a case of conviction? Are you afraid that you, of all men, will be tempted to partake too freely?”

“No, no; but I was talking to those miner chaps. There are a lot of them who drink like fishes. I was preaching as well as you could have done, Parson Easyman, one unbroken flow of eloquence, when one of them spoke up and said, ‘You take your glass yourself, doctor, with the best of them.’ ‘That's not the point,’ replied I; ‘you fellows don't know when to stop, that's why I recommend you to take the pledge.’ ‘Then show us an example,’ cried another—the greatest soaker amongst them, by

the way—"take the pledge yourself." "If I do, will *you*?" said I "Yes," shouted he, little dreaming that I meant what I said. "And you, and you, and you?"—I spoke to his comrades now. "Yes," cried they. So I walked up to the table and signed, and the rest followed. Not a bad day's work that. Take the glass away, Easyman; I'm feeling a bit down to-night, and the smell of the stuff tempts me."

"It is '51 port," remarked his friend, holding it up to the light

"I can't help that," replied the doctor, overtaken once more by his whimsical laugh. "I've sworn off."

"Is there no end to your quixotic spirit of self-sacrifice?"

The question was uttered involuntarily. Involuntary also was the admiration of the doctor's self-denial. The Reverend Benedict Easyman loved his glass of wine. The enjoyment with which he partook of it was only equalled by his moderation. His friend and he had hitherto indulged in the mild dissipation together, Herrick not scrupling to aver that there was more self-control displayed by the moderate drinker than by the total abstainer.

He replied to the interrogative eulogy with a reproachful expletive.

"It is not self-sacrifice," he cried; "I wish it were. It is Hedonism breaking out in another place, that is all."

"As how?"

"I seek my own pleasure. What is that but Hedonism, which sets pleasure as the right aim of existence. I can have none as long as these fellows loaf around every Saturday evening as drunk as lords; that is the long and short of it."

"So you give up a special enjoyment—for it *was* an enjoyment, you know a good glass of wine as well as I do—with the idea of saving them."

"Precisely so."

"You desire to save them because——"

"*Because.* Ah, there you go, Easyman. You have caught my trick of analysis. Well, frankly, because I wish to promote my own enjoyment. Their abstinence will give me more pleasure than my own moderate drinking. One has to look things in the face if one is made that way, that is the truth. I am afraid there is no getting out of it."

"My friend, you are a Sophist."

"No, no, merely a Hedonist, nothing worse—if there *be* anything worse, which I greatly doubt."

He stretched out a long, shapely hand, and replaced the stopper in the decanter.

"I believe a glass of good wine is just what you need," said the Reverend Benedict Easyman.

"If I don't turn my back upon it I shall fall into the same delusion," laughed the doctor. "The faculty generally are not on my side nowadays, I admit, but if it were not for those drunken fellows over yonder," pointing valleywards, "I would fight for my opinion, and hold it with the minority."

"Your convictions remain the same, then. You have not changed them?"

"Bless your soul, no. I am a devil of a fellow to stick to them, like my father before me. A clear case of heredity, than which there is nothing stronger."

He paused in mid-speech to give his host's housemaid the opportunity of making her master aware of her presence, to which end she had already made sundry futile efforts. She rewarded him by a smile, and addressed the Reverend Benedict Easyman.

"Widow Jarvis is waiting in the hall, sir. She would be very grateful if you could call in to-night. Her husband is worse, she says, and very uneasy in his mind."

"Did you tell her that I had a friend with me, and that it is now our supper hour?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go to her again and make her understand that it is impossible for me to call upon her to-night. I will, however, be with her early in the morning."

"Yes, sir."

"Jarvis is very bad, Easyman."

It was Herrick who spoke as the trim housemaid tripped away

"I can't be of any possible use. How can I?"

"I am glad that I am not a parson."

"And pray why?"

"Because, being a doctor, I do not need to ask that question."

He took out a black-covered, much-bethumbed note-book and made an entry. Easyman, glancing over his shoulder, read the name of Jarvis, preceded by a few others.

"Are you going to all those places to-night?"

"Certainly."

"Do you propose to live without sleep?"

"Unfortunately that is an impossibility."

"Then what *do* you propose?"

"To manage with as little as is possible while the typhus is about—to fight it as long as I can keep body and soul together. I'm hungry, old fellow. Let us go to supper. Come, Don."

CHAPTER II.

THE two friends went up the broad flight of stone steps together—the rector languidly, John Herrick with the rapid tread of a busy medical man, whose time is worth more than money. Seeing that one of the finest geraniums flagged for want of water, he descended as quickly as he had ascended and found leisure to supply its necessity. The room they entered was long and low, lighted by a large hanging lamp, which cast a soft glow over the dining-table. The silver dish-covers could scarcely have been made more brilliant—Mr. Easyman's housekeeper saw to that. The rector had arranged the flowers himself, in private and a little shamefacedly, being well aware that this was woman's work. The effect was excellent. Slender old-fashioned vases of finely-cut glass held their burden of dark roses and starry jessamine bravely, and in the centre of the hospitable board stood an ancient punch-bowl filled with fragrant *Maréchal Niels*.

"You need not remain," said the rector when the maid had removed the covers; then, turning to his companion as soon as they were left alone, "we can converse more freely without a listener. It irks me to have a woman watching every mouthful I eat, and pouncing on my plate before I have half finished. Under such circumstances there is no chance of waxing confidential."

"No," replied Herrick somewhat absently. It occurred to him that something greater than the presence of a third party at that moment prevented confidence between them, and he wished, with apparent irrelevance, that his friend would alter his mind about not going to see Jarvis until the morning. He had no mind to sit in judgment upon him—nothing was further from his thoughts; but there are certain actions which have a stubborn knack of christening themselves right and wrong in spite of affection and partiality. His train of thought was interrupted by a laughing reminder that a salmon cutlet awaited him, and in

his abstraction he filled the glass beside him with sherry. The mechanical action restored him to a sense of his surroundings and of his duty as a guest. His healthy, heart-whole laugh rang out reassuringly as he gulped down half a tumbler of water with a wry face, the rector watching him.

"Why, man alive," said he, "you are getting so quixotic that I am half inclined to hope the rumour about you is true—you really want a wife to look after you. Of course, as far as I am concerned, the wish that you should have one is purely unselfish. Things couldn't be the same between us if you got married. Again, things couldn't be the same between us if you went off your head, so perhaps, after all, I am choosing the least of two evils. By the way, John, is it true?"

Herrick laid down his knife and fork, which he had been plying with the vigour of a hungry man.

"Oh, yes; it is quite true," he said simply.

"And the name of the lady?"

He answered with a smile that, kindling, illumined his face, transfiguring the earnest grey eyes and lending to them a new beauty.

"Her name is Doris, quaint and sweet as its owner. Has rumour told you that also? You know her, of course—the squire's youngest daughter."

"Upon my word, Herrick, you are a lucky fellow."

"I don't think that is quite the expression, Easyman."

His face was still transfigured; his eyes glowed.

"Allow me to congratulate you."

The two friends clasped hands.

"I never thought *she* would have *me*," remarked Herrick. The italicized words fail to convey the intensity of expression with which they were enunciated. "But," he added exultantly, "there is no limit to a woman's power of self-sacrifice, eh, old friend?"

"You underrate your own attractions," said the rector.

His tone was encouraging, but he contemplated the rugged face opposite, conjured up a vision of Doris Treleaven's girlish beauty, and wondered. He had seen her only yesterday, standing among her flowers, fairer than any rose that grew, with the blue of the sky in her wide innocent eyes and captured sunshine gilding her luxuriant hair. Again he glanced at John Herrick, and again, being but dull of comprehension, he wondered. In his friend's heart there was surprise also. It was of

a tender and reverent order, and his touch was, if possible, gentler as he smoothed Don's head, rewarding his patience by a tit-bit of salmon.

"Upon my word," cried the rector, "I wonder how ever you had the cheek to do it." He had been casting up in his own mind the future prospects of the squire's daughter, and wondering inwardly how that gentleman could sanction the engagement with a humble local practitioner. "How did it come about?" he added, yielding to a curiosity which he was hardly sanguine enough to imagine would be gratified.

"How did it come about, eh, Don?" reiterated the doctor laughing. "You and I don't know, do we, old man? and what we don't know we cannot tell."

"I've often wondered why Doris refused so many eligible offers. Has the little puss been reserving herself for you all the while? Why, you are a good fourteen years her senior; who would have dreamt of such a thing?"

"I am sure I don't know; not I, for one."

"Yet you ventured to propose to her."

"That's just it, and I was sober, too, on the word of a total abstainer."

He lifted the glass of water to his laughing lips, and his laughing eyes met his friend's.

"We are going to be married in six months time," he said; "it is like a dream."

"Where will you live?"

"Where I live now, of course; I shall make as many improvements as my purse will allow, and Doris will be perfectly content."

In spite of reading the commandments every Sunday of his life, the parson forgot the tenth, and looked with a sudden wistful longing at the man before him. His own married life had been short, four years only; the wife he had wedded had brought him a fair share of worldly gear, and being the younger daughter of a person of distinction, the match had added to his *prestige* in the county. Husband and wife had respected one another, no word of dissension had marred the tranquillity of their union; but love—well, they had dispensed with that, and neither of them had complained of its absence. Odd, that at this moment of all others a vague sense of discomfort should seize upon the placid rector; odder still that it should be aroused

by a single hurried glance at the dark face opposite. He averted his eyes and caught a glimpse of his own countenance in the oak-framed glass above the chimney-piece. Twenty years ago he had been a handsome man ; his good looks had not forsaken him even yet, but he doubted whether they, plus riches and position, could have won a Doris Treleaven for a bride. And yet she was willing, nay, if report said true, even eager to forsake her luxurious home and grace John Herrick's shabby old-fashioned residence with her presence.

"Well, really," ejaculated the rector, "it is extraordinary."

A long silence fell upon the couple ; it lasted while the cloth was removed, after which, mindful of his duty as a host, the Reverend Benedict Easyman placed a box of cigars on the table. Herrick lit one and possessed himself of the arm-chair by the window ; his friend sat opposite ; a breeze stirred the leaves of the trees and caused them to rustle, the water in the fountain-basin was tinged with silver, the moon shone in an unclouded sky, piercing a network of foliage through which, but a few hours since, the summer sun had glanced merrily. A broad bar of white light stretched across the lawn ; glittering stars shone out, sharply outlined against a dark blue background ; the whole scene was so fair and peaceful, and the cool evening air so refreshing after the heat of the day, that the rector was fast becoming drowsy. He was roused by the sound of his guest's voice.

"Look at the sky," he said, "it is a regular picture ; out of the mouths of babes and sucklings we hear wisdom. One of your curate's youngsters said something very suggestive the other day ; she was trotting along at my side, the sky was very blue, with just a fleecy cloud here and there. 'What a pretty ceiling,' cried the youngster. 'No, my dear,' I replied, with my usual acumen, 'that's not the ceiling ; that's the sky.' She looked up in my face rather contemptuously. 'Well, isn't it the ceiling of the street all the same?' said she. That was a pretty idea, was it not?"

The parson shook his head. "Children are frightfully precocious in the present day," he remarked regretfully.

His guest relapsed into silence ; it occurred to him that he was not very fortunate in his choice of subjects to-night, and he wondered, after a fashion peculiar to himself, whether this arose from any special want of tact on his own part.

The rector spoke next, returning to a point which had been dropped by mutual consent.

"I take it," he said, "that that talk of yours about Hedonism means that you have been reading up your philosophy lately. I ought to do the same; mine has rusted considerably. I do just remember that the sect to which you profess to belong were the followers of one Aristippus, but I must confess that I should be rather in the dark as to their views, if you had not taken it into *your* head to hammer them into *mine* so persistently."

"Yes, I daresay." Herrick spoke absently, surreptitiously consulting his watch meanwhile.

"Bless my soul, man! you are not thinking of leaving yet," ejaculated his host. "I was just going to get out the chess-board."

"I am extremely sorry, but it is late, and there are ——"

"Those people to visit, whom you have no need to visit till to-morrow, except for your ridiculous quixotism."

The doctor, laughing, repudiated the epithet, and framed another word with his lips.

"Oh, hang Hedonism," cried Easyman unclerically, joining in his merriment *volens volens*; "I may as well see you part of the way."

He donned a light overcoat as a protection against the night air, and the two passed out together along the wide, straight gravel path, bordered on either side by fragrant stocks, into a country road flanked by hedges where honeysuckle twined and sweet wild roses clambered.

"I'll turn in here for a moment," said Herrick, pausing at the door of a low thatched cottage; "I'm a bit anxious as to how Abraham Penruddock will get through the night."

"Oh, aye, yes, of course."

There was a trace of misgiving in the answering voice, and more than a trace of hesitation, for Abraham Penruddock, the "sumpman," was a regular attendant at St. Martin's church, and it occurred to his spiritual shepherd that a call from him might be welcome. But it was really too late for visiting, except, of course, for a medical man, to whom night and day are alike, so the parson leant against a stile while John Herrick, being admitted, passed through the low doorway, with a cheery greeting which reached the ear of the listener left without. An elderly

man lay on the narrow bed, pinched of face and gaunt of aspect ; he slept peacefully. His wife rose and greeted the doctor ; her hands were not idle, for although she rarely glanced downwards to watch the progress of her work, the stocking at which she knitted grew apace.

"I am thaat thankful, doctor," she said ; "he took a turn soon after you left this afternoon, about haaf-past four ; he's saafe now."

"You think so."

"I doan't think ; I know. Look at his faace and you won't doubt."

Dr. Herrick leant over his patient, his plain features beautified by a quiet gladness.

"I thought ee'd be rael pleased," said Mrs. Penruddock, "Waat else could ee be? Every one do know it's all your doin'."

"No, no, not all."

"Every one do say how clever ee be."

"That's as it may be ; but, believe me, my good woman, if your husband had died, I should have been just as clever ; I should have tried just as hard. However, in the meanwhile, he is going to get better ; that is all we need concern ourselves about at present, except to give him his physic regularly, and to be careful as to nourishment."

He slipped a coin into her hand, and was gone before she had time to express her thanks.

Mr. Easyman had a word to say anent his prolonged absence.

"You need not have waited," laughed the doctor good-humouredly ; "it is certainly time for all respectable folks to be in bed and asleep."

In spite of this last remark the rector walked on beside him, condescending to show some interest in Penruddock's case, about which his friend was willing to speak freely, for his eyes still shone with the pleasure that had filled them when he endorsed the wife's exultant statement, "he's saafe now."

"I'll not cross the railway line with you," observed the parson ; "I ought to be going home."

Herrick glanced at him a trifle wistfully ; he had hoped that he might change his mind at the last moment, but a glimpse of the clear eyes that read the meaning in his own, and of the lips that set themselves so firmly, convinced him to the contrary. A

sudden thought came to him. He spoke even more swiftly than usual and with great earnestness.

"Easyman," said he, "forgive me if I appear impertinent, but it seems to me that your work comes in here: Jarvis is about as bad as he can be; medical opinion is against me, but I verily believe that he is dying of a broken heart."

"On account of his son, you mean?"

"Just so. William Jarvis is going to the bad altogether; that's sad enough to all intents and purposes, for he was a fine enough fellow once; but what is worse is that he is dragging his wife and children down with him, and the woman deserves to be happy, she is as good as gold."

"I know it; the fact has not escaped my observation."

The speaker's tone was didactic, and caused Herrick to wince. He spoke with a touch of fretfulness.

"Well, isn't that sort of thing in your way of business?"

"That is rather a coarse way of putting it, yet I daresay you are right. But what am I to do?"

The Rev. Benedict Easyman hardly expected any answer to his question; none came. Herrick leant forward with his arms upon the gate, looking absently along the line. The moon shone clearly, the dog-daisies on the banks gleamed white; it was light enough to read the letters cut out in the turf and outlined by gleaming chalk stones, which proclaimed the name of the station.

"The 11.30 train will be here directly," observed John Herrick; then, with a sudden change of tone, "Hullo! what is that?"

He shaded his eyes with his hand; the man at his side did likewise. A figure stood on the line which both recognized.

"William Jarvis," cried the doctor. "What in the name of common-sense is he doing there?"

Common-sense appeared to have but little to do with his actions; strong drink, that crafty stealer of men's brains, had reduced the keen and active miner to a condition of feeble imbecility. He stood irresolute, swaying backwards and forwards, with the pure moon shining down upon his foolish heated face.

The parson and the doctor shouted to him with one accord, their voices dying in their throats as their ears caught the sound of the train in the distance. It came on steadily.

"Jarvis, William Jarvis!" The doctor had found his voice

again ; it rose above the rushing sound of the approaching train, piercing the clear summer air. The Reverend Benedict Easyman glanced at his friend's face ; it was whiter and more earnest than its wont ; he spoke aloud and very rapidly.

"A mere cumberer of the earth," he said, "with the drink in him ; but, rid of that, a man full of promise. And the wife, God help her ! and the children——"

He broke off suddenly, with a shout that might have roused the dead :

"Hi, there, Jarvis !" The foolish, irresolute figure yet lingered, swaying idly from one side to the other, and the 11.30 sped onwards.

Then, thought being swifter than lightning, Herrick's mind flew to Doris Treleaven, and in his heart he bade God bless her lest he should be too late, lest the iron wheels should crush the life out of him.

"Stay !" cried the parson sharply.

His words were unheeded ; John Herrick had darted to the rescue. A while later he lay with his head upon his friend's knee, death in his face, while William Jarvis, sober enough now, bent over him, his tears falling on the doctor's pale brow.

"You have given your life for his," cried the parson, a sob in his voice, "a drunken scoundrel like that."

"No, no, for his wife and the little ones," gasped Herrick. "You will be good to them, Will ; you will be a man ; you will not let me die in vain. Promise."

"I promise."

The answering voice was choked with tears.

The Reverend Benedict Easyman bent over his friend once more. The admiration and reverence that stirred his heart's depths found vent in words of praise, but John Herrick's pale lips curved in a gentle smile.

"Hedonism !" gasped the dying man, "mere Hedonism."

Then he closed his eyes, and his pure, brave soul went to meet its Maker.

Madame de Brinvilliers.

By A. M. JUDD.

MARIE MAGDELAINE GOBELIN, Marquise de Brinvilliers, was connected both by birth and marriage with some of the noblest families of France. She was the daughter of the Sieur d'Aubray, *lieutenant civil*. This appointment was worth 50,000 francs a year.

Marie was one of four children, M. d'Aubray having two sons and two daughters.

She was not only beautiful, she was also highly accomplished, and witty and fascinating in her manners. She appeared exemplary and kind, and there was no trace to be seen on her lovely features of the evil soul lying dormant under that fair exterior.

Unhappily for herself, she was married when quite young to the Marquis de Brinvilliers, who was not the sort of man to raise and ennoble the woman he made his wife.

Perhaps had she married some one else, Marie de Brinvilliers' name would not have gone down to posterity covered with infamy.

The marquis was a *roué* and libertine, who consorted with very undesirable characters much beneath him in rank.

In the army he had met St. Croix, a man of mean birth and no fortune, and the latter industriously sought his friendship. Being handsome and engaging, clever and entirely unscrupulous, St. Croix easily succeeded. The marquis introduced his friend to his young and beautiful wife.

Having succeeded so well with the marquis, St. Croix set himself to gain the affections of the lady.

In this he had little difficulty. Thrown together by the incredible folly of the husband, a guilty passion soon sprang up between the pair. Marie de Brinvilliers, even from her own confession, seems from her earliest years to have been heartless and depraved, though she presented a fair outside to the world, and

her passion for St. Croix was so strong that she flung all respect and decency to the winds in order to gratify it.

She carried on her intrigues so openly with her lover after her separation from the marquis that she soon made a scandal in her family.

Her father, M. d'Aubray, tried his utmost to put an end to it. In vain alike were remonstrances and threats, she seemed to glory in her shame.

Enraged, at length M. d'Aubray obtained an order for the arrest of St. Croix, little dreaming that by so doing he was signing his own death-warrant. The gallant was arrested while he was in a coach with Madame de Brinvilliers, and in spite of her protestations he was conveyed to the Bastille, where he was kept a prisoner for a year.

But he was not idle during the time he spent in that gloomy fortress.

Some little time before, when the mania for poisoning in Italy was at its height, several women in France, some of high rank and others in the middle and lower classes, had avowed in the confessional that they had poisoned their husbands, and disclosed from whom they had received the drugs. In consequence of these disclosures, two Italians were arrested and thrown into the Bastille.

One of these men, named Exili, was a great adept in the art of compounding the drugs used in these murders. He and St. Croix struck up an acquaintance, and finding the latter an apt pupil he soon succeeded in making him as expert in their manufacture as himself.

When set at liberty, St. Croix's first act was to acquaint his mistress with what he had learned, and to show her a sure mode of revenge for the insults she had received.

One Glaser, an apothecary, allowed the two poisoners to mix their compounds at his place.

Her father was her first victim. In 1666 he was going to Offernon to settle matters with his tenants; Madame de Brinvilliers accompanied him, and taking advantage of an opportunity, she put poison into some broth which she gave him. Its effect was very soon apparent, for he was taken so ill that he had to return to Paris without finishing his affairs. He remained in great agony till his death, which followed soon after.

But there yet remained other members of her family to be got rid of, and she and St. Croix set about removing them from their path.

St. Croix had a servant named La Chaussée, a worthy disciple of his master. This man the conspirators managed to get into the family of her brother, M. d'Aubray, where he had plenty of opportunities of carrying out the fell work with which he had been intrusted. He mingled poison in both drink and food, and the two brothers of Madame de Brinvilliers soon followed their father to the grave.

The elder M. d'Aubray's death seemed so much the result of disease that no suspicions were excited. The two young men arrived from the provinces to attend their father's funeral. They found their sister overwhelmed with grief, and did their best to console her. Antoine was said to be very much attached to Madame de Brinvilliers, and went to his grave entirely ignorant of the fact that his sister's hand sent him there.

But St. Croix's revenge was not satisfied with the death of the old man. Reckless, extravagant and avaricious, he was always in want of money, and looked to Madame de Brinvilliers to supply his wants. Her own portion soon was gone, but there were the shares of her two brothers and her sister, which she would inherit on their deaths. La Brinvilliers had not the slightest scruple about assisting him. He prepared the poisons; she undertook to get them administered, or do it herself. To try the strength of the first doses she administered them to dogs, rabbits and pigeons. None of the poisons were meant to kill immediately, so that she could try them once upon a person without fear of murder. She poisoned a pigeon pie and watched the effects upon the guests at her father's table. It is even said, though Voltaire denied this, that wishing to be more certain of their effects, she went round to the hospitals and administered the poisons to the sick poor in the soups which she brought in apparent charity. Still not satisfied, she tried the next experiment upon herself, taking care, however, to first procure an antidote from St. Croix. Then she turned her attentions to her relatives who stood between her and the wealth that her paramour was always craving for.

In less than ten days the poor old father was a corpse, done to death by his inhuman daughter. The brothers, perhaps from

being young and strong, took longer to die. The elder, a *lieutenant civil* as his father was before him, was the first to succumb to the administrations of his faithful valet La Chaussée. The younger, a councillor, resisted the effects of the poison longer, but in six weeks time he too had gone to his last home.

These three deaths occurring so rapidly one after the other in the same family at length excited suspicion.

The bodies of the brothers were opened and they presented the same appearance, the stomachs being black, the livers gangrened and burned, and showing all the signs of poison.

A stir was made, and the rumour went forth that they were poisoned.

Strangely enough La Chaussée, the cruel minister to the vile passions of others, was not suspected. He had behaved himself so circumspectly that he had gained the favour of his master, Antoine d'Aubray, and the latter, to recompense his services, left him a legacy of 100 crowns.

The widow of Messire Antoine d'Aubray, the elder brother, seems to have suspected her sister-in-law almost from the first, and to her was in a great measure due the fact that Madame de Brinvilliers was eventually brought to justice.

There was only the sister now to share with La Brinvilliers the family wealth and property. St. Croix determined that she should die the same death as her father and brothers. Nothing but the whole of the property would satisfy him.

However, luckily for herself, Mademoiselle d'Aubray's suspicions seem to have been aroused, and by quitting Paris she escaped the doom intended for her.

La Marquise had murdered her father and brothers to please her lover. Her thoughts now turned to the perpetration of one on her own account. She had lived unhappily with her husband, who was a loose and dissipated character.

A few years after her marriage, when yet she showed a fair outside to the world, she had posed as an ill-used wife. The marquis had not the art to conceal his vices, and she had little difficulty in effecting a legal separation from him.

But separation was not divorce and she wished to become the wife of her accomplice, St. Croix

Poison was much the easiest way of getting rid of him, as she had amply proved in her own family. So to her lover she

applied for a supply of the tasteless and scentless drug which had already proved so efficacious.

But this did not suit St. Croix. He had no wish to marry the woman whom he had led on from crime to crime. Though a monster himself he had no wish to marry one, and was not at all anxious to fall in with her views. If ever he had loved his guilty mistress that love had faded by now ; all he coveted was her wealth, and he was not at all anxious for the death of the marquis.

But it would never do to tell a woman of violent passions this. He pretended to enter into her plot and provided her with poison for her husband. But he also took care to supply a remedy.

The affectionate wife gave the marquis a dose of poison one day. The equally attentive friend gave him an antidote the next. In this manner the unfortunate man was tossed about between them like a shuttlecock for some time. He finally escaped death, but with shattered health and a ruined constitution. The day of retribution, however, was at hand, and a terrible mischance brought the murders to light.

St. Croix, who had been in Italy, was a dabbler in poisons even before he met Exili in the Bastille. He knew something of the secrets of those detestable hags, La Spara and Tophania, but his chief knowledge was imparted to him by the Italian during his sojourn in the French prison. It was Exili who showed him how to prepare the celebrated *succession-powder*, which was used with such fatal effect in France in removing those who stood in the way, as well as the colourless, tasteless liquid poisons so extensively employed in Italy. The nature of some of these poisons compounded by St. Croix was so deadly that, when working in his laboratory, he was obliged to wear a glass mask to preserve himself from suffocation.

One day the mask slipped off and St. Croix was hoist with his own *pétard*. The death he had dealt to so many was his own fate. His body was found the next day in the obscure lodging where he had fitted up his laboratory. As he appeared to be without relatives, the police took possession of his effects. Among other things was a small cabinet, to which the following document was affixed :

“ I humbly beg that those into whose hands this box may fall,

will do me the favour to deliver it into the hands only of La Marquise de Brinvilliers, who resides in the Rue Neuve St. Paul, as everything it contains concerns her, and belongs to her alone ; and as besides, there is nothing in it that can be of use to any person but her. In case she shall be dead before me, it is my wish that it may be burned, with everything it contains, without opening or altering anything. In order that no one may plead ignorance, I swear by the God that I adore, and by all that I hold most sacred, that I assert nothing but the truth ; and if my intentions, just and reasonable as they are, be thwarted in this point by any persons, I charge their consciences with it, both in this world and that which is to come, in order that I may unload mine. I protest that this is my last will. Done at Paris, May 25th, 1672.

“(Signed) ST. CROIX.”

As may be imagined, this extraordinary will excited curiosity, and instead of being forwarded intact to Madame de Brinvilliers, as was urged in the document, the cabinet was opened and its contents investigated.

They were startling enough, and revealed the horrors that had been perpetrated by St. Croix and his mistress.

In the cabinet were found several packets, some filled with *Droque de Sublimé*, others Vitriol Romain, and prepared vitriol. There was also a little earthen pot with three-quarters of an ounce of opium in it. Packets of opium weighing an ounce each. a piece of antimony three ounces in weight. A little box, in which was a kind of stone called the Infernal Stone. A packet, on which was written, “Papers to be burned in case of death,” and containing thirty-four letters, said to have been written by Madame de Brinvilliers. Twenty-seven pieces of paper, on each whereof was written several curious secrets. Various other packages, in which were found seventy-five *livers*, directed to divers particular persons. There was also a document, signed by Madame de Brinvilliers, promising the sum of 30,000 francs to St. Croix. The date it bore was the time that the Messieurs d’Aubray were poisoned ; doubtless it was the price of their lives. Alexander de Lamane, advocate of Madame de Brinvilliers, at the trial, tried to explain this away, by saying “that it was a thing gotten of her by surprise, which even in case her hand be

proved, she supposes she is able to show why it should be declared null."

The vials and powders were sent to a chemist for analysis. The packets of letters were retained by the police and opened. They contained damning evidence against both the marchioness and La Chaussée.

Besides the promissory note for 30,000 francs were letters in her own handwriting, detailing the misdeeds of her life and speaking of the murder of her father and brothers, in terms that left no doubt of her guilt and of that of St. Croix and his servant.

Madame de Brinvilliers, when informed of the death of St. Croix, made most desperate endeavours to gain possession of the papers and cabinet before they should be opened. She tried bribes, entreaties, threats. When her servants failed to recover the box, she went herself, but on being peremptorily refused, she saw that all was lost and immediately took to flight.

Next morning the police were on her trail, but she succeeded in baffling them and escaping to England.

Up to the finding of the documents, no one had thought of suspecting that model servant, La Chaussée, but now attention was directed to him. He had thought himself quite secure and made no efforts to insure his safety by flight. Like a thunderbolt came the revelation of what the cabinet contained. He was so alarmed that he completely lost his head; he was confused in his actions and prevaricated and lied when questioned. Too late he thought of flight—he was arrested before he could escape and brought to trial.

He stoutly denied all complicity in the murders, but the rack made him tell a different tale. Unable to withstand the torture, he confessed that he had poisoned the Messieurs d'Aubray, that he received the poison from his former master, St. Croix, that he received a hundred pistoles from Madame de Brinvilliers on the death of her brothers, and also the promise of an annuity for life from her and St. Croix.

These revelations naturally created a feeling of horror and of insecurity among all ranks; no one would be safe with these secret poisoners in their midst. Not only confidential servants but near relatives might be plotting away the lives of those who stood between them and the attainment of their desires.

La Chaussée was condemned to be broken alive on the wheel.

This sentence was carried into execution in March, 1673, on the Place de Grève, in Paris. The Marchioness de Brinvilliers was, by default, sentenced to be beheaded.

But she had made good her escape to England, and, there being no extradition treaty in those days, the long arm of the law could not reach her in the domicile she had chosen.

She remained in England about three years, and there is no record of her having poisoned anybody during that period. Perhaps the supply of poison had failed, and St. Croix being dead she could obtain no more.

Early in 1676, thinking that the affair of the murders had blown over, and that she might venture to return to the Continent, she proceeded secretly to Liège. She was ill advised in doing so, however, for the French authorities were by some means apprised of her return, and arrangements were promptly made with the municipality of that city to permit the agents of the French police to arrest her within the limits of their jurisdiction.

La Brinvilliers was not without a certain amount of cunning. She took refuge within the walls of a convent, knowing that the Church would not give up any one who took asylum under its shadow.

Here she might have been safe, if she had not once more given way to her depraved passions. A priest one day sought admission to the convent and obtained an interview with the marchioness. He said that, being a Frenchman and passing through Liège, he could not leave that city without paying a visit to a lady whose beauty and misfortunes were so celebrated. Her vanity and self-love were flattered by the evident admiration of the handsome priest. She lent a willing ear to the compliments he paid her and fully believed that she had inspired him with the passion he professed. It did not take very much solicitation to make her agree to meet this ardent lover outside the walls of the convent, where their amorous intrigue might be carried on more conveniently than within.

The time and place were agreed upon. Faithful to her appointment, she left the sanctuary of the convent walls, and to her horror discovered that, instead of the lover she expected, she found herself in the custody of a police officer.

Desgrais was an officer of the Maréchaussée, who had been

sent from Paris to arrest her. Knowing that force was not of the slightest avail, he resorted to stratagem to accomplish it. He disguised himself as the priest smitten with love for her, and so managed to get her into his clutches.

Not an agreeable *rôle* to play, one would think, deluding a wretched woman, even though a criminal, by a pretence of ardent affection.

It is said that she was like a mad thing when she found herself trapped. She raved, she threatened, she protested. She tried to choke herself with stones, gravel and pins. On the journey, when given refreshment, she bit a piece out of the glass and tried to swallow it.

She wrote letters to various persons trying to bribe them to assist her to escape and to poison her guards. Some of these letters were very damaging to her, though her counsel tried to explain them away at her trial. In one she wrote to Theria, she said she would be a lost woman if she reached Paris. She promised him 1,000 pistoles if he would corrupt his archers to let her escape.

Failing with Theria, she tried others. She told Anthony Barbier Archer that she would make his fortune if he would only save her.

All was of no avail. The law had her and the law meant to keep her. As a last resource she tried to poison herself, but even here she failed.

Once in Paris, her trial was not long delayed. The proofs against her were overwhelming, and the most damning were admissions in her own handwriting, found among the effects of St. Croix. These letters, coupled with La Chaussée's dying declaration, were more than enough to convict her. On the 16th of July, 1676, the Superior Criminal Court of Paris pronounced a verdict of guilty against her.

The judges, after a long and serious consultation, at last condemned her and passed sentence upon her. Because she had not made any confession of the crimes of which she was accused, it was ordered that she should be put to the torture of the rack. However, rather than undergo this she avowed the crimes of which she had been convicted, and gave an account of several things that before were not so fully known. She lamented her acquaintance with St. Croix, the cause of all her misfortunes.

Though she was very weak, having suffered much by sickness, she had tried to take her own life, but was prevented ; yet she went undauntedly to suffer what public justice had meted out to her.

The execution was appointed for the 17th July, 1676. From the prison in the Conciergerie she walked bare-footed and with only a linen robe covering her, carrying in her hand a large wax taper. She was accompanied by the officers of justice and five hundred archers to the church of Notre Dame. Here, kneeling before the great gate of the church, she made her confession. That done, she was put into a little cart and carried to the Place de Grève, the ordinary place for executions, where a scaffold was erected. Being come thither, she entertained those that were about her several hours with a relation of all the remarkable passages of her life, which she did without the least sign of fear or apprehension of her approaching death, yet with a great sense of the wicked actions she had committed, for which she desired the pardon of all good people. Having almost wearied herself with much speaking she concluded all with the usual acts of devotion, and undauntedly submitted her neck to the axe.

Her head being cut off, it was, together with the body, burned and the ashes thrown into the air.

Madame de Sévigné says that when on the way to the scaffold she entreated her confessor to exert his influence with the executioner to place himself next her, that he might hide from her view "that scoundrel Desgrais who had entrapped her." She asked the ladies who had been drawn to their windows to witness the procession, what they were looking at? adding, "A pretty sight you have come to see, truly."

The day after the execution the people came in crowds to collect her ashes, to preserve them as relics. She was looked upon as a martyred saint, and her ashes were supposed to be endowed by divine grace with the power of curing all diseases. Truly the ways of popular folly are wonderful sometimes.

The trial made a great commotion in Paris. Nothing was talked of but La Brinvilliers. All the details of her crimes were published and eagerly read by the populace. It is to be feared that many who had not thought of it before, were inspired to follow her example of secret poisoning. At all events an epidemic of poisoning broke out in France, and the prisons teemed

with persons accused of this hateful crime. It affected all classes, some of the highest in the land being suspected.

Before Madame de Brinvilliers was executed proceedings were instituted against M. de Penautier, treasurer of the province of Languedoc and receiver-general for the clergy.

Madame St. Laurent, widow of the late receiver-general, accused him of having poisoned her husband, in order to obtain his appointment.

Penautier was known to have been on intimate terms with Madame de Brinvilliers and St. Croix, and was thought to have procured his poisons from them.

He was arrested and taken to the Bastille. La Brinvilliers, when interrogated, refused to say anything which might implicate him.

Penautier was a wealthy and influential courtier, and the greatest influence was exerted to prevent his case going to trial. The government winked at this, and the inquiry was eventually stifled after he had been in the Bastille several months.

The Cardinal de Bouzy was another suspected of having procured the *succession-powder* from Madame de Brinvilliers and her accomplice, though he was never brought to trial. His estates were burdened with several heavy annuities, and curiously enough, all the annuitants were so thoughtful as to die off one after the other in a short space of time, in the most obliging way, leaving the estates free for his enjoyment.

The evil grew to such an extent that Louis XIV. instituted the *Chambre Ardente*, with extensive powers for the trial and punishment of alleged poisoners.

A Grub-Street Quirote.

THERE is a certain dingy, narrow street off the Strand—a street narrow and dingy enough to drop its right to the name of street and descend to that of alley—which may be claimed as a veritable relic of old London. Its perennial gloom seems to suggest idle apprentices, link-boys and sedan-chairs ; with fitting accompaniments of silken skirts, high-heeled shoon, knee-breeches, buckles and rapiers.

None of these things now gladden the eyes doomed to dwell within the high tenements of Barton Street. The place is given up to smuts and mud, despairing puppies and grimy landladies. Its chambers are the appropriate haunt of the tag-rag who find—or, at all events, seek—their daily bread in Grub Street ; the dregs of journalism left by the filtering process of editorial selection ; and a remnant of better-class *employés* from the many theatres and music-halls at a handy distance. Even Barton Street has its degrees : first floor looks down on second, second on third, and third declines a bowing acquaintance with the attics.

Jim Halstead and his wife were quite aware that when, at six months' intervals, they mounted painfully from floor to floor, until they reached the topmost storey, they were in reality "going down in the world." With each ascent, the glum face of Despair drew a little nearer to Jim's anxious young countenance, looked more straitly into Jim's recoiling eyes, and left therein a truer reflection of its own baleful visage. Ella, alone, refused absolutely to meet the monster's glance of doom. It was a simple thing, she assured Jim, to turn one's head the other way.

Ella was sure that the higher she and Jim mounted, the airier and brighter was their dwelling-place, and the better their chance of catching a good-night glimpse of the sun—when, after enjoying himself in more aristocratic quarters, he was quite tired, and thinking of going to bed.

They had been first-floor lodgers at the time when a younger

Jim had opened his astonished eyes on Barton Street. They had climbed a storey when Master Baby, dimpled and short-coated, but still disapproving of Barton Street, had been called on to comfort poor Dad—the victim of an absconding editor and proprietor, whose effects consisted of an overdrawn banking account and a cupboard-full of accepted and unpaid-for MSS. Jim had been “on the staff” of the defunct print; and in his provincial innocence had agreed to let his weekly salary “run on” while the editor-proprietor “worked up the circulation.” And the young pair had retreated to the airy attics, when baby Jim decided finally against growing up in Barton Street, and shut his eyes on the grime and the fog and the smoke, and even on Dad’s agonized face.

Ella held up her pretty brown head for Jim’s sake, even after the tiny coffin had been carried down the creaky stair, and Jim himself had committed her treasure into the present keeping of Mother Earth.

Jim went out morning, noon and night; pleaded for work and found none; and returned to listen with a weary smile to Ella’s suggestion that on the morrow he should not go out at all. He was to stay at home with her, to write that wonderful leader they had talked over so often (giving it each time a different subject, for the sake of extra interest and excitement), which was to be accepted on the moment by the *Times*, at least, and paid for at a fairy-tale rate. Jim never found heart to put that leader on paper; but went humbly from office to office, and wrote nothing more remunerative than answers to advertisements. Ella had a great many reasons to offer for Jim’s failures; and they were, one and all, highly honourable to Jim, and extremely critical of the powers that prevail in Grub Street. Her chatter was more encouraging than the study of the diminishing total in what Ella proudly called her bank-book. The young couple never had possessed spare pounds to commit to the faithful care of the Postmaster-General; but down in the country spare shillings had not been unknown, and Ella had loved to gaze on the particulars of her accumulated store. That had been in the happy time when she and Jim had “loved and laughed;” although it had even then been necessary to

“ . . . keep accounts, and measure and weigh.”

It was summer when baby Jim said farewell to Barton Street: it was during the long, chilly October evenings that the elder Jim discovered why he was, indeed, a miserable man. For what is a fellow worth who cannot provide beef tea and port wine and sea air immediately, on the bidding of a portly Æsculapius, with a beautiful carriage and pair—who even stares aghast at Æsculapius's fee, and would not for a moment dare to suggest that he should "call again?"

On that misty morning when Ella, without apparent provocation, fainted dead away and refused to revive until a jugful of water had been exhausted on her, terrified Jim flew to fetch a fashionable doctor, without pausing to remember that attics ought to be contented with parish officials. Æsculapius went home in a sanctified mood because, in asking from Jim five guineas instead of twenty-five, he considered that he had been charitable to foolishness.

When Jim's water, and the landlady's brandy (which was cheap to her, but dear, later on, to Jim), and the surprise of the doctor's visit, had fairly roused Ella to a sense of what she had done, she had questions to ask about the fee which Jim declined to answer, until she showed signs of tears. Poor, dear old Jim never had hidden anything from her before, and she was sure the secret must be something dreadful. Then Halstead confessed: and in the soreness and grief of his heart pointed out that Æsculapius had rendered his own advice futile. Ella made light of the advice, but wept abundantly over the lost guineas, which would have bought Jim a town-made suit, wherewith to captivate the hearts of stony editors. Still, she was far from being the typical "little wife" of the toiler in barren ways. Ella Halstead had the sweetest and brightest of young faces and the most graceful of girlish figures; but she possessed also a cultivated intelligence and a reserve fund of common-sense to balance her inexperience.

Æsculapius had spoken seriously. Jim not only admitted the fact; he pressed its meaning home while he implored Ella to take beef tea and port wine four times a day.

"That's double what the doctor said," he argued, "and it might do instead of the seaside, if you are quite sure we can't manage that."

"Of course I am sure," returned Ella, "and I'm equally sure

that we can't afford port wine. But, Jim dear," she added soberly, "we'll do the best we can, because it's right, and because I know that if I weren't here you never would have courage to worry all those silly editors. You would just stop trying; and instead of finishing up as leader-writer on the *Times*, you would be entirely contented to do 'notes and news' for some stupid suburban weekly. That's the depths, Jim; and I want you to *rise*."

Ella sat erect on her stool. Jim smiled, and stroked her hair, waiting for the concession which was to come.

"So I don't mean to let myself 'fade away,' or anything of that sort. We will try the beef tea, twice a day, as the doctor ordered."

Jim accepted the proposal, and, mistrusting Mrs. Greg, made the beef tea and served it up himself, setting out the modest fare neatly, with thin toast and a spotless white cloth. If hopes and prayers could have given it strength, Halstead's beef tea would have been in itself a liberal diet; but by the time December dawned, he had lost all faith in his cookery. Ella lay on the sofa all day long, and while Jim was absent, let her thoughts waver between solemn things and the nearing possibility of Jim's hopeless descent to the suburban news level. She would now have made further concessions to the opinion of *Æsculapius*; but the bank-book total approached vanishing point, and sea air was quite as practicable as port wine.

It was early one afternoon when Ella heard her husband's tread on the stairs; she heard it, too, with some self-reproach that her ears conveyed so little comfort to her heart. It had become almost easier to bear solitude and painful reflection than the continual watch of Jim's misery-stricken eyes, and it was daily more difficult to meet that misery with a smile.

Halstead made Ella's tea, and knelt beside the sofa while she drank her first cup.

"What news, dear?" asked the girl cheerily. "You wouldn't be so silent if you hadn't something particular to tell me."

"I don't know that it's anything very particular, darling. I daresay it won't mean anything to me, at all events. Do you remember reading in the *Pall Mall* that the editorship of the *Daily Messenger* was vacant?"

"Yes. Didn't I beg you to apply for it? and, foolish fellow! you wouldn't."

Jim laughed in appreciation of the humorous idea.

"Well, it isn't obtainable now, anyway. And who do you think is the new chief? My cousin, Arthur Wood."

Ella plunged at once into an ocean of suggestions, recalled at length by Halstead's moody face.

"Ah, I see," said the girl gently. "Poor Jim! your pride is in arms."

"I can sink pride for your sake, Ella. But you know I looked up Arthur when we first came to town. I showed him my credentials, and he said they weren't any good—the paper I had left wasn't big enough. I suppose he was right. Anyway, he didn't seem to take to me, or something. You see, we're really strangers; and he always has been a successful fellow."

Ella held Jim's hand tightly against her breast. She was weighing the relative values of a poor man's pride and a poor man's wife.

"It is hard for you, Jim dear," she said presently; "but I wish you would try your cousin."

"I'll go this afternoon," replied Halstead, understanding perfectly for whose sake independent Ella preached humility. And having shared her second cup, and struggled greatly with a morsel of toast, he put on his shabby coat once more and set forth.

The offices of the *Daily Messenger* were in Fleet Street. They were not palatial, but, better than that, they were historical. Distinguished ghosts might well be expected to lurk in the dark corners of the narrow staircase up which Halstead went, at a pace indicative of a desire to get the thing over, on his way to the editor's room.

• The unlikely happened that afternoon, when Arthur Wood looked up on his cousin's entry and greeted him with a cousinly hand-shake accompanied by an encouraging smile. Halstead had described Wood accurately as a very successful man. Struggling quill-drivers wondered "how on earth the fellow kept dropping into good things," and in candid moments gave the credit to pluck and ability. The new chief of the *Daily Messenger* was a born editor; he knew it, and he made others know it. He had climbed the ladder with a rapidity which had given

no time for backward glances at those toiling in the rear. But he was not ill-natured, and now that his own position was assured, he was prepared to lend a helping-hand to such as might share, without diminishing, his glory.

"Hallo, Jim! That's you, is it? Well, old man, how goes it?"

Halstead waived the question to which his appearance gave its own answer, and ventured on a few friendly congratulations. They were received most graciously.

"Yes, here I am," said Wood, thumping with energy the arms of the editorial chair, which he filled amply, like a personification of self-appreciative prosperity. "And here I mean to stay. Would you believe it? That fool Macfie, my predecessor, threw up his post because our proprietorial asses expressed a hope that the paper would 'support the Government through thick and thin during the coming struggle.' Well, Ministers went for the evacuation of Tumchunderpur, and Macfie had a Scotch conscience and views of his own about Tumchunderpur. So off he went, and here am I. Nothing to do except pat Ministers on the back and smile on the L. C. C.—And now, Jim, what can I do for you?"

Young Halstead fairly trembled. Sweetness and light seemed to radiate from his cousin's beaming countenance. Surely all this friendliness and familiarity must imply, at least, a readiness to oblige?

"I hope I am not making myself a nuisance," poor Jim blurted out, recalling the wretchedness of many rebuffs. "There must be no end of fellows bothering you for work, and I daresay your list is full."

"Well, I don't know," returned the other, stroking his own hair benignantly, the while his person and his glance inclined themselves across the piled-up table in the direction of his cousin's anxious face.

"Of course, I don't refer to the staff," went on Halstead hastily. "Every one knows that the *Messenger* is splendidly manned, and I don't suppose you want to make a single change. But there may be some occasional work, and if you *have* anything——" the speaker's voice was eloquent.

Wood's alert brown eyes woke a corresponding light in his cousin's. It was his way to get out of his associates the best of

which they were capable: with that awakening gaze on him, Halstead felt almost able to believe in himself again. Fumbling in a pocket he produced a large envelope, and drew out some slips of small type.

"Specimens?" asked Wood kindly, holding out his hand.

"Things I did in the country," muttered Jim, blushing awkwardly as he thrust the soiled slips into his cousin's fingers. "I've some scrip at home; but I don't know if it's up to much."

"But you were on the *Evening Balloon*, weren't you?—thing that smashed up when Simpson vanished?"

"Yes, I was on it," owned Halstead, blushing more hotly.

"There was some precious good writing in the *Balloon*, too," said Wood thoughtfully. "Simpson managed to fool three or four clever fellows. I hope they'll come my way. I mean to make the most of the one who has done so," he added heartily, in a tone which made Halstead's pulses leap. "Well, Jim, of course your work's not new to me. I hardly need go through the form of reading stuff of yours. I daresay you've thought I might have done something for you before. Perhaps I might, if I hadn't been so deucedly pressed for time. Never got an hour to look after my relations' affairs. But look here, old fellow, I can take you on the *Messenger* staff."

"On the staff!" echoed Jim amazedly.

"Grimsby is leaving us. He has given *us* the sack, confound him! Romer, of the *Mercury*, has resigned through ill-health, and Grimsby has been offered his place, and of course he has taken it. Grimsby is the best dramatic critic in town now, and the *Mercury* was bound to get him." Wood heaved a long editorial sigh, which was not exactly flattering to his late dramatic critic's proposed successor. But Halstead knew the value of Grimsby, and remarked in a tone of respect:

"The *Mercury* gives a big screw, doesn't it?"

"Four hundred and fifty. And that's not all. The *Mercury* has a reputation for its drama business, and its critic walks over the course in the special article way. You know what I mean. The monthlies—reviews and the rest—no longer smile sideways, but beam full-face on stage-land. Papers go in where once on a time pars would have feared to tread. A new show at the Lyceum, or the appearance of a wonderful Hamlet from Timbuctoo, is duly chronicled and commented on. Somebody has

to do the chronicling; and the voice of the *Mercury* critic is bound to be heard. The post pays, you see, more ways than one."

"Yes, Romer was always to the front."

"He had dropped off lately. But that's one good thing about the *Mercury*: it sticks to its people like glue. Still, he has gone; and Grimsby is the gainer. Now, Jim, do you think you can do Grimsby's work for us? Answer frankly, old fellow. I've had no chance of judging of you in that line; but I can take your word."

Halstead's heart beat faster; but he spoke out bravely.

"No, Arthur, I can't do it. I don't know anything about the modern stage—at least, not more than any intelligent fellow who reads the papers—and it wouldn't be fair to you to pretend that I do."

Halstead clutched desperately at his retreating courage, and tried not to remember Ella's face. There was something reassuring in Wood's pleased smile.

"That's straightforward, anyway, lad:" and the editor, who was much the elder of the cousins, eyed his visitor with some kindly pity. "See here!" he went on, turning over Jim's printed slips, "half these things are reviews, and some of them long ones. I know you can write well. How do you feel towards the book world?"

Halstead caught his breath; he was in sight of his journalistic paradise.

"Feel!" he broke out impetuously, "why, I've read every book worth reading that I could lay my hands on since I was ten years old!"

"Then you're 'in touch with modern thought and opinion,' and all that sort of twaddle," said Wood irreverently, "and I know you are benevolent. You'll suit us down to the ground, Jim. We don't want the New Criticism on the *Messenger*—half-a-pound of envy, hatred and the rest, to the grain of friendly encouragement. We don't want to 'criticise,' lad; we want to 'appreciate.' Give us plenty of appreciation, and as little as you like of the other sort. No crushing of the worm for us; not a bit!" Wood pushed back his chair on its groaning castors, laid his arms on his knees, and looked into the puzzled face before him with some humorous attention. "There are certain publishing

firms, my boy, which advertise with us every day. Coddle 'em, Jim ; coddle 'em."

"I don't think I understand," said Halstead blankly.

"Keep an eye on their books, old man ; that's all. Pick out the good ones and forget the rest. Give them first place, and nurse their young sucking-authors into roaring lions. Then will the hearts of publishers rejoice and their advertisements grow big."

"I thought publishers were popularly supposed not to have any hearts ?" said Jim, rousing up sufficiently to take his mentor's advice for what it was worth. And then, giving himself a joyful pull together, he began to realize that he was as good as grafted on the staff of the *Daily Messenger*. What glorious news for Ella ! It was now quite undesirable to avert his mental gaze from the face of his young wife. Rivers of beef tea and port wine might be said, metaphorically, to flow before his eyes. And then there would be the books ! Jim was young and fresh, and it did not occur to him to affect the indifference of the practised reviewer. He knew that he panted after books.

"But you'll want to know what the screw is," remarked Wood, "and I hope you won't be disappointed. You see, a daily can't spare a great deal of room, as a rule ; but I intend to go in for literature. I made up my mind to it as soon as Grimsby sent me his resignation. We can't cut out the *Mercury* in the drama line ; but, hang it ! we'll have our own way with literature. Our present man is Mowbray."

"Arnold Mowbray ?"

"Yes ; the fellow who wrote those 'Essays on Egoists' there was such a fuss about."

"But he's a bit of a swell, isn't he ?" murmured Jim, unable to conceive the possibility of his undistinguished self following the author of "Essays on Egoists."

"A great deal too much of a swell," remarked Wood grimly. "Nobody is good enough for him. He has been on the *Messenger* for six years, and hasn't made a friend. No one knows how or where he lives, and no one wants to."

"But he writes so splendidly !" exclaimed Halstead, his face lighting with frank enthusiasm. "I had no idea he did newspaper work."

"Oh, I daresay the *Messenger* pays for his bread and cheese,"

said Wood carelessly, "and leaves him lots of time to toil for the reputation he is going to have by-and-by."

"Won't he be a great loss to you? I suppose, Arthur, you are wild that he has resigned?"

"Resigned? not he! I shall give *him* the sack. Oh, yes! he does his work well, I admit; and his name is a good one. I didn't think of turning him off till you came in this afternoon; but I won't pretend I shall be sorry to do it."

Jim Halstead's face dropped forward on his hands. He stared at the faded carpet while he spoke:

"You don't pull together, perhaps?"

"As to that," began Wood deliberately, "when I know a man understands his work I don't interfere with him any more than I can help. I don't like Mowbray, and I daresay he knows it; but, all the same, he will have a first-rate testimonial if he chooses to come to me for one. He can write, certainly;—more than that, he has real critical insight; and the knowledge of a student, not of a hack journalist. No, Jim, I can appreciate a good thing when I have it, and I daresay Mowbray and I would have pulled together all right if I hadn't wanted to find *you* a place in the crew. But I shan't regret the change a bit. I know you will do us credit. The rest of my staff are capital fellows, and I shouldn't care to lose any of them; but I'll let Mowbray go without a sigh."

"Couldn't he do Grimsby's work?"

"Not any better than you—not half so well as you would do it. As I said, he is a student—not a first-nighter."

Halstead's head dropped lower, and Wood, who had caught the accent of strain in his cousin's voice, attributed it not unnaturally to modest doubt of his power to stand in Mowbray's shoes, and exerted himself to assure Jim of a warm welcome from both the editor of the *Messenger* and his coadjutors. The praise and the good-fellowship came very pleasantly from the elder man to the younger. Jim, grateful and sensitive, was quick to give them their value. But he was out again on his sea of wretchedness, and Ella's face was gazing at him reproachfully from the shore. Each man's conscience is a mystery to himself. Jim's, which would have bowed to the "coddling" of advertisers, for business reasons, forbade him absolutely to supplant Mowbray.

He put a few questions, and put them lamely, as one who

knew beforehand what the answers would be. They served only to rouse Wood's temper.

"Come, Jim," said his cousin brusquely, "what's the meaning of this beating about the bush? Do you want Mowbray's place or do you not? I don't mind saying that there's not another fellow in town I should care to change him for, but—honestly—I'm sorry I haven't helped you before and I want to do it now."

"Thank you." Halstead rose. The world which, so far as the editor's room was concerned, had been swimming painfully before his vision, grew steady again. The face of his wife was pushed from memory. "It's kind of you, Arthur, and I daresay you'll think me an ass, but I can't turn another fellow out of a good berth which he deserves to keep."

"I do think you an ass!" cried Wood, red and fuming. "Please yourself; but believe me, my good fellow, tender consciences don't pay. Take Mowbray's place or leave it to him, as you like—only, remember there's nothing else going on the *Messenger*, and nothing likely to be going, so far as I know. The fellows suit me, and I don't want to make enemies of them."

Halstead took his dismissal, and, turning towards the door, pulled it open. Wood sat still and wrathful. Never again would he trouble himself to try to do this young fool a good turn. It had been an effort to offer him Mowbray's post—for Wood liked to captain a staff of distinguished writers, and whereas Halstead was certainly unknown, Mowbray was coming steadily to the front. Yet he had noticed the whiteness of his cousin's lips and his distressful countenance, and though angry, he had compunctions.

"Yes, you *are* an ass, Jim!" he repeated with indignant emphasis. "What on earth is Mowbray to you?"

"Nothing, God knows!" returned Halstead bitterly, "and the work you have offered me may not mean anything to him. But it may, and I can't take the risk."

"I don't suppose he'd care a rap. He never cares about anything. He'll drop the *Messenger* of his own accord before long, I daresay."

"If he does," said Jim, smiling forlornly, "you can let me know. I'll take what he leaves, and say grace for it."

Wood's reply was a grunt of which his cousin did not stop to

guess the meaning. Jim stumbled heavily down the staircase, looking on neither hand, and so carried his despairing self out into the life of the city. His steps turned mechanically in the direction of the Strand ; but as soon as his purposes became again under control, he checked his impulse to go homeward and made for the Embankment.

It was dusk ; and the beauty of fretted towers, sleeping palaces and clear-cut arches, with the contrast of brilliant light from lamps and windows, clove the dark waters into mottled reflections. Long-drawn blackness and gleaming gold met, clashed and parted on the restless surface upon which Halstead's eyes dwelt heedlessly. The silence of the coming night-time was not yet here ; humanity's sway remained undisturbed, as Jim's ears witnessed. Swift or lagging footsteps passed continually ; voices drew within perception, swelled, and faded away. Yet Jim's inattentive brain held no converse with his active senses. He was thinking of his lost chance and of his waiting wife. He thought long and heavily, while the dusk passed into evening and the evening drew to its end. The travellers by road and river grew fewer, and every now and then came moments of a great silence. During one of these pauses Halstead started upright and lifted his face to the darkness overhead. A horrible sensation of loneliness overpowered him and drove him shudderingly on. He had realized that the time was coming when he would be in reality alone.

Jim hurried forward, cursing, not the cruelty of fate, but his own incompetence. The dockyard labourer did a man's work better than he. Of what avail his two hands if they could not fill themselves with gold for Ella's use ? A handful of sovereigns would save Ella's life. The salary of the post Arthur Wood had offered him would do more. It would send Ella happily away to the sea ; it would bring her back strong and rosy ; it would suffice for a modest housekeeping and pave the way to better things. For himself, it would provide the weekly happiness of dropping the cheque into Ella's lap. When he had fairly conjured up this felicity, and set by its side the black picture of an alternative future without the cheques and without Ella, Jim discovered that his steps were moving in the direction of Fleet Street and that he was hoping devoutly that his cousin had not gone home to dinner.

There was a block on the road, and a gazing crowd had congested the passenger traffic. While a burly policeman set things straight, Jim came to a halt before the fascinating windows of a large bookshop. His eyes travelled over the good things within, and he forgot Wood while he coveted vainly the latest Browning volume. "New Editions of Popular and Valuable Works," ran the legend on a conspicuous card over a row of cloth-bound respectabilities. Jim looked below at a title; it was, "Essays on Egoists."

Jim had read the book through the good offices of a free library, and had forthwith set up its author as one of his lesser divinities. He had not known then that the *Daily Messenger* had provided the bread and cheese which had left Mowbray free to moralize on the pains and pleasures of self-concentration.

Halstead leant against a stone projection and asked himself as sternly as any cavalier of old whether he loved Ella or honour more?

Mrs. Greg's staircase creaked familiarly as Jim reached the tiny landing at its head.

"He do step heavy," grumbled the old woman in the regions below. "I'll charge him extra for wear and tear. And I'll take up them carpets to-morrow. Attics don't want carpets; and don't look for them, neither."

Halstead stood on the landing to hold a last converse with his quaking soul before he dared meet Ella's eyes. How should he proclaim to her the decision which, in the opinion of his experienced cousin, had been that of a fool? What if Ella's sympathy and approval should fail him now, and her reproaches should turn his agony of despair into the blacker agony of remorse?

The shadows of the little sitting-room, lighted by its single lamp, might serve, he hoped, to hide from Ella such revelations as his face might be inclined to give her. He meant to tell his story in the most common-place way possible; to make hot the unsuccessful beef tea just as usual; and to laugh in a mirthful fashion if he should happen—as he frequently did—to blacken the toast. He had bought a propitiatory offering of sixpenny-worth of indifferent grapes. As he opened the door, he drew these timidly from their covering, and reflected that

he would allow Ella to enjoy them before he made his confession.

A glimpse of the room showed him that the friendly power of darkness, like all other friendly powers, had failed him that evening. A large lamp, seldom lighted, burned cheerily on the round table; a blazing fire burned more cheerily still. And so, taken unawares, Halstead's face told its tale, and was read without difficulty by two pairs of intent eyes.

For Ella was not alone. Jim realized this fact as soon as he turned to her corner. Beside her sofa, in Jim's own particular chair, sat a man in evening dress; on another chair lay an Inverness cape and a crush hat. Ella and her visitor, fresh from the contemplation of Jim's face, turned to each other with a glance of comprehension.

"Jim, dear, you are late," said Ella's voice, quiet as usual, but with something behind the quietness. "I am glad you are not *too* late—to see Mr. Mowbray."

Jim's civility seemed to have deserted him, for he stood still and gazed at his wife's companion.

"And, Jim, dear," continued Ella, with a joyful quiver in her voice, sweeter to Halstead's ears than the sound of many sovereigns, "Jim, dear, I *am* so proud of you."

At this fine absurdity, Halstead really succeeded in laughing, but the laughter turned almost to a sob. It had been the dream of his young years to make Ella proud of him. The grapes dropped from his hand to the table, and he went forward, hesitating and confused. He had caught the name "Mowbray." There might—there must be—many Mowbrays, but the fact did not occur to him at that moment. He only wondered dimly how *the* Mowbray had reached the topmost storey in Barton Street; and why the author of "Essays on Egoists" was now advancing, with outstretched hands and kindly words of greeting, to meet unlucky Jim Halstead.

The visitor spoke in a smooth, mellow voice:

"I was so sorry you were out, Mr. Halstead; but your wife has been very good to me. You see, we have had to make friends without you."

Jim blushed furiously.

"I'm very glad—Ella would be very glad—we're awfully proud, of course——"

"She was kind enough to take me on trust. I think it was because we were so entirely agreed—about *you*. There was an eavesdropper in the *Messenger* office this afternoon, Mr. Halstead. He didn't hear much ; but he contrived to understand—before his conscience pricked him into retirement. He understood that Don Quixote lives in the nineteenth century, and that he is the sort of fellow one wants to shake hands with."

Jim mechanically returned Mowbray's grip. The elder man pushed the younger forward gently, until Halstead found himself by his wife's side, and, catching the radiance in Ella's eyes, dropped on his knees within reach of her eager arms.

"Jim, *darling!*"

Mowbray smiled sympathetically—perhaps a little sadly. He stood over the young pair like a sober-suited guardian angel, but his thoughts were of such earthly commonplaces as weekly salaries and competent doctors.

Jim rose presently and looked into his visitor's face—lined and worn rather from much study and scanty play-time than from the onslaught of age, but to Halstead's reverent eyes infinitely awe-inspiring. Jim was not beyond hero-worship, and he felt an almost boyish delight that this fine countenance and stately figure belonged to the author of "Essays on Egoists."

"It's awfully kind of you to come, Mr. Mowbray. I don't know what you heard ; but I see, now, what an ass I should have been to suppose I ever could——"

Halstead pulled up abruptly ; remembering that, in truth, he did *not* know what Mowbray had heard.

"Nonsense, lad," said Mowbray gently. "Do you know your cousin and I are agreed that you are the very man for the *Messenger*? I am no better than a fogey now-a-days, and only fit for my den down in Surrey—though if you and your wife will come sometimes and brighten up the shadows, I'll do my best to pipe for your dancing."

* * * * *

Arthur Wood and Jim Halstead sat together in the editor's room. They had just been planning a special Christmas supplement devoted to Christmas literature—that is to say, to books of all degrees published at any time during the last three months of the year—and the editorial eye beamed.

"It will be a big thing," remarked Wood, drawing close to the fire, "and it will leave the *Mercury* nowhere. Catch Grimsby reeling out four pages of Christmas drama! The fact is, Jim—I own it—you're a comfort to me. There's stuff in you. Now Mowbray would *never* have managed the supplement. By the way, what an odd thing it was—his dropping in with his resignation that very evening after you refused his place on the staff. By Jove! I caught my breath when he began about it. I almost fancied he might have heard something; and he's not a man one wants to quarrel with. But no; nothing of the sort. Just one of those coincidences which *do* sometimes lighten the darkness. It was a piece of luck for the *Messenger*, and for you, too, you young fool. You didn't deserve it."

Wood rambled on. Jim sat in decorous silence. He and Mowbray had agreed that the editor's well-meant generosity never should be cast up against him.

"You're going?" said Wood when, a little later, his young cousin rose.

"Yes," returned Halstead, looking frankly happy. "You know Ella has been staying down at Brighton with a cousin of Mowbray's, and she's coming home to-night. I think she'll like our new diggings. We've a dear old landlady, and she has been fussing over our rooms all day. I shan't mind leaving Ella with *her*."

"Glad to hear it, old fellow. But don't buy your Christmas dinner, or any of that rot. Mary and I want you both to come to us."

"Thank you awfully, Arthur. We'd have come gladly, only we're going down into Surrey for Christmas week."

"To Mowbray's place, of course?" suggested the other, smiling cheerily. "Ah, well, it's good to be the *protégé* of the author of 'Essays on Egoists.' You'll be writing for the reviews in no time. And to think you had compunctions as to Mowbray's bread and cheese! Well, good-bye, Jim; and remember that Mary and I must have you and Ella on New Year's Day;—and I'll ask the Essayist to meet you!"

ELLINOR DAVENPORT ADAMS.

By the Sea.

AS on the lonely shore they strayed,
The scholar and the fisher-maid,
Beside the melancholy sea,
They talked how this and that might be,
And, wrinkled by the ebbing of the tide,
The flat wet weed-strewn sands stretched far and wide.

'Twas evening, and a wistful glow
Spread where the ruddy sun hung low ;
The autumn day was hasting by
And night encompassing the sky ;
October's fair delightful afternoon
Sped, like a holiday that ends too soon.

"'Tis strange," the scholar said, "to deem
How seldom things are what they seem !
The great sun rises not nor sets,
But stays for ever—like regrets."
"Not so," replied the pensive fisher-maiden,
"The sun seeks rest, with all day's sorrows laden."

"Shall I or not," the scholar thought,
"Take to my heart this mind untaught ?
Should I or should I not regret
Love's sunrise when Love's sun had set ?"
Aloud he said, "The sun's apparent setting
Is like the apparent passing of regretting."

The long gray wavelets murmured faint,
Like a dull, pitiful complaint ;
Far out at sea, a single sail
Caught the vibration of a gale.
"Nay," said the maid, "for when the stars come peeping,
Beneath the sea the wearied sun lies sleeping."

He looked upon her, and the sun
Went down. "See now," she said, "'tis gone!"
"But Love remains," the scholar cried.
She said, "Or changes, like the tide."
And the low washing of the wanton sea
Filled the salt breeze with plaintive melody.

"Tides ebb and flow—the sea remains,
Like Love with all its joys and pains,"
He said. "Love cannot end and die
While the sun blazes in the sky.
Sweet, I entreat you lay your hand in mine;
The earth grows dark, yet still the sun doth shine."

Then the soft rippling of the tide
Like some glad tender music sighed,
And if the sun sank down or stayed
Was nothing to the man and maid,
As, by the sea's great, careless, fickle heart,
They took each other, till death them should part.

FAYR MADOC.

A Girl's Folly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),
Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

"ONE NOTE TRACED."

"THERE is much sorrow at Dene Prior," Mrs. Warrener wrote to her step-daughter a day after the events just chronicled. "Mrs. Stanmer has been suffering from a severe attack of the worst form of influenza, and since yesterday her symptoms have been most alarming. She is quite unconscious, and poor Arthur is nearly heart-broken—you know how he loves his mother. Rose Davenport is showing the utmost devotion to her old friend. No daughter, your father—who has just returned from the house—says, could be more attentive. There is some other trouble, too, Arthur hinted, which is not made public, but which will seriously affect his future. I think if you wrote him a few kind lines they might comfort him."

Belle's pride struggled with her impulse to try and give him comfort in his trouble, whatever the latter might be, for some time. She reminded herself that she had written a very friendly and full—almost a pleading—letter of explanation after he had seen her talking to Dick Ogilvie. This letter he had not thought it worth while to answer. Should she again humble herself by addressing a man who seemed to wish to have done with her; or should she let "ancient kindness" prevail, and write him a note of sympathy? Finally ancient kindness did prevail, and she wrote, but a trifle more stiffly, perhaps, than she would have done if she had been endowed with second sight and had any idea of the clouds of trouble that were encompassing him.

The fast-approaching wedding occupied most of Belle's thoughts now. It is impossible to be staying in the same house with the bride and not be engrossed by the momentous business

of her marriage. Sylvia, having given her word to her mother that she would be married on the appointed day, as Mr. Christopher desired, went through the consequent preparations quite calmly, and gave Mrs. Gould no further cause to fear that she would again jib and upset things.

Mr. Christopher had not expressed inordinate delight when he was told that his conditions were to be complied with. He did not receive the announcement which Mrs. Gould made to him with rapture. But Mrs. Gould reminded herself that a rapturous reception of the intelligence would not be becoming in a man of his age and bulk. It was more fitting that he should receive the news of his happiness with middle-aged calm than with the enthusiasm of a young lover.

"I am glad to hear she has come to her senses, and I hope we shall have no more nonsense," he said unsmilingly. Then he added :

"I suppose Lily induced her to behave like a reasonable woman, instead of like a silly child."

"Lily said nothing whatever to her about it."

"Really! She promised me to give my message naming my conditions."

"She passed the message through me, and never attempted to influence her sister one way or the other," Mrs. Gould said decidedly.

"Indeed!"

It was a most extraordinary thing, but Mrs. Gould could have sworn—only she never did swear—that Mr. Christopher looked rather pleased than otherwise on hearing of the passive attitude Lily had assumed.

It was to be a very quiet wedding. In the first place, Mrs. Gould's house did not lend itself to a large reception, and, in the second place, even had it done so, the number of their acquaintances in London was too limited to fill it. A cousin of Mr. Christopher's was to act as best man, and one or two of his City friends with their wives completed the list of his friends. Mr. and Mrs. Warrener came up from Prior Common, as the rector was to perform the ceremony for his wife's niece, and the mother of the bride, her sister and Belle Warrener completed the party.

Sylvia had stood out for a white silk dress, made high and

without a train, and she wore with this a tiny white bonnet trimmed with white heath. She would not hear of either the bridal flowers, orange blossoms or myrtle. "They would look silly on a garden-party bonnet," she wisely argued. So she was allowed to have her way, and the result was that, with the exception of her costume being white, she was as unbridelike as was possible. She would not wear any jewellery either, excepting the rings which covered her fingers, and which her gloves concealed.

The wedding was to be at two o'clock, and at twelve the bridegroom and his best man arrived to partake of the substantial preliminary meal which Mrs. Gould had substituted for the ordinary after-nuptial breakfast or reception. There was an air of hilarity about him which surprised them all, especially Lily, who had reason to believe that he would not have been inconsolable if Sylvia had refused to come to his terms.

"One note traced," were his first words when he came into the room where the Gould family party were assembled.

"One note of what?" Mrs. Gould asked.

"One of the bank-notes that Melling paid to the person who sold him Sylvia's ring. I have just had a wire from the detective who has the case in hand that one of the notes has been traced, and that extraordinary complications are likely to arise."

"Never mind the bank-notes now. Let me introduce you to my sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Warrener."

Mr. Christopher greeted them absently. His thoughts were with that traced bank-note.

"Oddly enough it has been found on my wedding-day; we will say two auspicious events happening on the same day," he went on, smiling in anticipation of their boundless sympathy. But this no one accorded him. To Mr. and Mrs. Warrener mention of the stolen ring and the traced note might have been made in the language of the inhabitants of Mars for all they understood about it. And to Sylvia the subject was a hateful one since Ann had spoken those mysterious words.

The servants, in pale grey dresses and white satin ribboned caps, were standing about in a state of excitement, though there was (to their chagrin) to be no wedding party. Ann even had come out of the silent sulks in which she had indulged since Mrs. Gould had given her notice, though the latter had sounded the note of dismissal in the softest tone, giving as her reason for doing it that

after Miss Sylvia's marriage she only intended keeping two servants—cook and housemaid.

But this morning Ann seemed to be glowing from some inward source of satisfaction. The seeming in fact was a reality, as she told herself continually.

"She" (meaning Sylvia) "is not bad. After this morning's work she'll never let *him* set eyes on her if she can help it. Then he'll learn the difference between one who goes away and marries the first man who asks her, and a woman who has stuck to him for sixteen years, and is ready to stick to him for all life."

Poor old benighted Ann! She little thought that it was this pernicious habit of "sticking" to him from which Dick Ogilvie had been trying to break away for at least fifteen years, eleven months and twenty-nine days.

As all the doors were open, Mr. Christopher's jubilant remark about the traced bank-note was heard by the servants standing in the passage as well as by the company in the drawing-room. Ann's swarthy flushed face faded to a pallid hue, and her lips formed the words, though she did not dare to speak the words aloud:

"I wish I had done it myself, but he was so impatient."

The wedding was as common-place and every-day an affair as the most prosaic person could have desired. Sylvia went through the ceremony as quietly and indifferently as she had done everything since she had finally given in to the inevitable at her mother's prayer. The bridegroom's thoughts were divided between the traced five pound note, which might lead to the discovery and disgrace of the thief of the ring, and speculations as to whether the *recherché* little dinner which he had wired to order at one of the Chester hotels would be as satisfactory as he desired. He meant to take his bride to Ireland, as he had some house property in Bray, and a demesne on the borders of Bantry Bay, where he thought of establishing an hotel which might rival Glengariff. It was his way to combine pleasure with business when he could, but, at any rate, never to neglect business. So now Sylvia was to be carried off to the Emerald Isle, which she perversely did not want to see, instead of to Brussels, where she had just hinted she would like to go, as she had some girl friends there.

There was one brief tussle between the newly-married pair

when they were on the point of starting. Their luggage was to follow the bridegroom's carriage in a cab, and when they went out Mr. Christopher caught sight of the two white bull-terriers chained up amidst the luggage, looking down and yapping yearningly at their mistress.

"Those brutes are not going; take them down," he said to the cabman, and the latter hesitated, and looked at the bride for further orders.

"They will go wherever I go," she said, springing lightly into the carriage, and in the face of the little crowd who had assembled to witness their departure, Mr. Christopher did not like to contest the point. "Sylvia was capable of doing very odd things," he reflected. She might even get out and walk back into the house and leave him to take his honeymoon alone! Accordingly he said nothing, but his looks were not those of a happy bridegroom with joyful eyes as he stumped into the carriage after her.

"That's over," Lily said contentedly, as they went back to the drawing-room to recoup the nerves which were shaken by the parting with afternoon tea.

"It has just begun. How will it end?" Mrs. Gould sighed.

The others breathed wishes for Sylvia's happiness as hopefully as was possible under the circumstances, and Lily said:

"It will go on very comfortably, I think, if Sylvia isn't silly often, as she was just now about those dogs. If she is, I suppose he will have to make her feel that he is master in his own house."

"He seems to have been most liberal about settlements and presents," Mr. Warrener said cheerfully, resolutely looking at the brightest side of the matter.

"So he has been and to mamma as well," Lily put in pleasantly, greatly to her mother's surprise, for she had thought and hoped that the secret of Mr. Christopher's munificence to herself was locked in his and Sylvia's and her own breast alone. It startled her to find that Lily knew of it.

"Dear old thing! what he has done for you, mamma, does away with the necessity of our going to any cheap place abroad to retrench. When we are tired of London we can go and retrench at Monte Carlo. I have always wanted to go to Monte Carlo. Every fortune-teller who has ever looked at my hand or cast my horoscope says I am to be lucky at cards and all games of chance."

"I hope you will never be lured into gambling, my dear Lily," her aunt said seriously, while Mr. Warrener roused himself to a little effort of gallantry by saying :

"It is impossible you can ever be unlucky in your choice of a husband, and the old adage says, 'lucky at cards, unlucky in marriage,' so I think the fortune-tellers must be mistaken."

"I don't know ; I hope not," Lily said thoughtfully ; "it would be so nice to have heaps and heaps of money of one's very own making. I would risk having a bad husband for the sake of good luck at the tables."

"When we leave London in the autumn Mr. Christopher has kindly expressed a hope that we shall visit them at the Brooks; he told me that you were most anxious to see the place, Lily."

"Of course I shall like it, and of course I told him that I was very anxious to see it. But the chances of going there are many and will keep. While you have the money to take us there I hope you will let me see something of the world, and I shall like to begin at Monte Carlo. Now I am going to take off my finery; it will have to last me some time unless that lucky Sylvia gives me a reversionary interest in some of her trousseau dresses."

"She is always so sweet and amiable that I can't bear to deny her anything," her indulgent mother explained when Lily had left them.

"And of course her wish to go to Monte Carlo is a mere natural girlish desire to see a part of the world of the beauties of which she has heard much," Mr. Warrener observed tolerantly.

"After all, there is, I think, quite as much excitement in watching the ups and downs of the fortunes of those who are around us as there can be in watching the fluctuations of luck at the gambling tables."

"Ah! you are thinking of poor Arthur Stanmer," Mrs. Warrener said sadly.

"What of him? What about him, papa?" Belle asked quickly.

"It is rumoured—mind you, *on'y rumoured* yet—that his title to the property is likely to be disputed."

"Impossible! By whom?" Belle cried.

"By—mind you, this is only rumour; no one knows anything for certain yet—an elder son of the late squire's by a former secret marriage."

"It's too dreadful! too dreadful to be true. Poor Arthur! dear Arthur!" Belle exclaimed, and in that moment she forgot everything excepting that she had loved him all her life.

Meanwhile Ann had divested herself of her wedding finery, and in her every-day sombre garments had slipped out of the house and made her way in an omnibus to the Victoria Station. A train was just starting which would stop at the station close to the village in which Dick Ogilvie was lodging. "It's an off chance that I find him at home, but I must chance it," she muttered to herself, and presently she was being shaken along after the bumpy manner peculiar to carriages on the Chatham and Dover line.

When she reached her destination she got out and stood for a few moments on legs that trembled under her to such an extent that a porter thought she was intoxicated, and offered her an arm to the third-class waiting-room, "until she could stand the fresh air a bit better." This indignity roused her from her nervous panic, and after inquiring the way to Dick's lodgings, she walked steadily and rapidly towards them.

She found them in a pretty thatched rose and ivy covered Swiss cottage of gentility, with a wicket gate and a clematis-covered arch leading into the neat bright garden that surrounded it. Near to the cottage there was a small stable and coach-house, and she was relieved from her anxiety as to "Dick's being in" by hearing a stable-man hissing over the horse he was grooming. The next moment she caught a glimpse of Dick himself through an open softly white-draped window in the cool recesses of a shady room. "I wish I had worn the grey dress and my fringe," she was thinking, as she glanced down in disgust at her sombre attire, when a young woman's voice struck upon her ear with the words:

"I wonder what this dowdy old thing coming up the garden wants?" and simultaneously a pretty bright-haired head, partially covered with a widow's cap, was momentarily thrust forward between the filmy muslin draperies and as rapidly withdrawn.

"And he gave his mother to understand that the widow who let the lodgings was elderly and staid—the scamp!" Ann thought, choking with rage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE VOICE THAT BREATHED O'ER EDEN."

TO do Mr. Christopher justice, even a dog or Dick Ogilvie's warmest admirer might have pardoned him for being slightly upset by the introduction of Bubble and Squeak into his earliest matrimonial midst. In the first place, Sylvia insisted that the bull-terriers should get into the first-class carriage which had been reserved for the newly-wedded pair. This was managed by means of a liberal tip to the guard, who undertook to smooth matters for them also at the Chester end of the journey, more out of admiration for the bride's pretty face and ways with the dogs, than out of gratitude for the sovereign the bridegroom had grudgingly slipped into his hand.

"They will be like lambs with me, but they'll howl all the time if they're put in the dog-van," Sylvia asserted ; but their behaviour, though they travelled first-class with their mistress, was that of the most ruffianly lambs that ever belied their proverbial qualities of meekness and lowliness. They whined and howled every inch of the way when the train was in motion, and when it stopped at a station they growled and barked ferociously and loudly. They established such an ache in Mr. Christopher's head before they were half through their journey that, though he might not have wished he had never been *born*, he most undoubtedly did wish that he had never been married. What was almost as maddening to him as their noise was the complacency with which Sylvia endured it. It did not even keep her awake. She coiled herself up in her corner, her feet stretched out on the opposite seat, and went off into a sound slumber.

She woke at rare intervals on the journey to Chester, but when they reached it she was wide awake in an instant, declaring she must see something of the dear old city before she could eat any dinner. She jumped out of the carriage, forgetting her dogs in her haste, and directly they lost sight of her they gave way to fury and snapped fiercely at the guard and porters, who tried first by persuasion and then by force to remove them from the carriage. They even bit at Mr. Christopher's new wedding umbrella when he brandished it at them, and savagely attacked his foot (an always gouty and rather tender one, and doubly so

this day on account of the newness and tightness of his boots) when he tried to push them from their fastness with it. To make matters worse, at this juncture some of the bystanders laughed, and Sylvia, who had come back to see what delayed her belongings, joined in the laughter.

"They're naughty dogs now because they are hungry and tired, but they'll be as good as gold when they have had some dinner," she condescended to explain. So she took them into the cab with her, where they sat on the seat opposite to Mr. Christopher, and glared dangerously at him whenever he presumed to move.

To his horror—rich as he was, he hated waste and extravagance—she began by giving them a plate of clear soup that looked like pale sherry, it was so exquisitely clear and refined, and went on proffering them bits of all the daintiest dishes that were handed round. When he saw her divide a quail between them his disgust and wrath burst their bonds.

"Upon my word, Sylvia, there will be no comfort and happiness in our domestic life if you waste my substance on those beasts of yours, and devote all your care and attention to them."

He had wisely waited for the temporary absence of the waiter before he spoke, for her answer came like chilled shot straight at him.

"Did you ever expect any happiness in our domestic life? I never did. Let me have the dogs and I will be contented, and make the best of it with them. If you take them from me I shall find something else to pet. I won't interfere with any of your pursuits and amusements; surely you may leave me the dogs."

"This is a pleasant and profitable way of commencing our married life," he stuttered, and she blessed the waiter for re-entering at the moment, as it spared her the necessity of replying.

It must further be admitted that Sylvia's mode of behaviour on her wedding-day was not conciliatory, and that her dogs were more intolerable nuisances, if possible, on the steamer from Holyhead to Kingstown than they had been in the train. Their devoted mistress had a brief but emaciating experience of sea-sickness, and was such a wreck when they landed that she was unable to look after her pets herself, and had to content herself

with the surly statement from her husband that they "were following on another car with the rest of the luggage."

But when they reached the Shelburn Hotel and she was shakily tottering up the steps, she saw the rest of their luggage carried in before her, and there was neither Bubble nor Squeak to be seen! But their loss brought no peace to the happy pair.

* * * * *

When the shapely little head, crowned by the crisp little widow's cap, withdrew itself, Dick Ogilvie sauntered up to the window, and then close to it, tugging away at the bell of the porch-door, he saw the woman who had been his *bête noire* from his boyhood.

"Good heaven! it's old Ann," he exclaimed, stepping back quickly, and his landlady, who had come in to consult him about his dinner, laughed rather wickedly.

"If it were a young woman instead of an old one who had hunted you out I should say you looked very guilty," she said merrily. "Listen! she is asking for you, and saying she must see you. I will be off."

Mrs. Watts, the bereaved widow of a struggling attorney, who had died of poverty, accentuated by her extravagances, flitted away through another doorway than that which led into the picturesque little flower-bedecked hall, where Ann was by this time standing waiting while the juvenile maid-of-all-work took the message to "our lodger," as she rather unceremoniously dubbed Mr. Ogilvie.

"I suppose I must see her, but what can have brought the fusty old faggot down here?" Dick grumbled to himself, and a moment later Ann was stepping as jauntily into the room as her flat feet and useful boots would permit her to step.

Everything about the woman's appearance revolted the man, who was as fastidious about personal neatness and smartness as if he had never (unwillingly) played the part of a dusty, travel-tattered and torn tramp in real life. He had on a well-made lounging coat, speckless trousers, shirt, tie and boots. It was a painful contrast in her eyes which he made to her own common badly-shaped leather boots, ill-fitting black stuff dress, fifth-rate reach-me-down jetted mantle and unbecoming bonnet. Her cotton gloves seemed to grow baggier and rustier when his eyes

lighted upon them superciliously. Nevertheless, in spite of all these mortifying emotions, her heart palpitated as fiercely as a romantic girl's of seventeen when she found herself in the presence of the man she worshipped, though she had never been able to extract a word or look of love from him in return.

"Well, Ann, what brings you down here?" he asked patronizingly, though he was annoyed at the interruption to his free-and-easy chaffing conversation with his widowed landlady which Ann's advent had caused. He would have looked and felt aggrieved, and to a certain extent annoyed, if any one had accused him of flirting with Mrs. Watts, or of treating her as one who was on the same social platform as himself, for Dick Ogilvie, shadily as he had at times conducted himself, never forgot that he was "a gentleman born." But the good-looking young relict of the late Mr. Watts flattered him and showed him very openly that she admired him as a man, and was proud to receive his attentions, whenever he took it into his head to pay them to her. She did not realize that he held himself above her socially, for as she said to her own gossiping circle of intimates, he was only a "commercial traveller after all, and her husband had been a lawyer." Still she recognized that there was something different to her own class about Dick, so she boasted of him liberally in her own little world, and made a fair show of being on most familiar terms with him. As Dick knew that he could drop her at any moment by leaving her lodgings, this boastful familiarity only amused him. At the same time, he hoped Sylvia would never hear of it, for, to use his own expression, he would have "chucked Mrs. Watts and a dozen others like her to perdition" rather than hurt and mortify Sylvia's loving pride in him.

Ann gasped; she was over-heated and over-wrought altogether, and his easy negligent air stung her. She took the chair he forgot to offer, and said as calmly as she could:

"I've come on business that concerns you. I want to ask you if you have changed any of those bank-notes I gave you the other day? If you haven't, give them all back to me, and I'll give you gold instead."

"My dear woman, what are you talking about?" he said gaily; "five pound notes soon burn their way out of my pocket. I changed one at a little pub. down in the country last week, and

another I've just given to my landlady for a week's rent and grub——”

“Get this one back, make that woman give it back,” Ann said hoarsely. “Don't stop to ask me ‘why ;’ get it back now, at once ! this minute !—you signed it on the back with your own name, didn't you ?”

“Of course I did,” he said wonderingly.

“Go and get it this moment ——”

“Where did you get them from ? When you tell me that, I'll get it back. You told me you had saved them from your wages ——”

“Dick, Dick, *get it back,*” she sobbed, falling on her knees before her stern young tyrant, who stood before her now looking like an Apollo full of uprightness ; “it's for your sake, for your sake ! I don't care what happens to myself.”

“And I'm d—d if I care either. Till you tell me where you got them I won't budge an inch.”

She threw up her arms and groaned, and her bonnet fell back, and she looked revolting. But she rose from her knees and spoke more coherently.

“Get this one back from your woman here, then I will tell you why I want it. You'll go down to the country pub. and try to get the other fast enough then—though I heard to-day *one* had been traced.”

“Why shouldn't they all be traced ?” he asked haughtily ; then in an access of fury he added, “You infernal old hag, in what sort of a rat's hole have you landed me ?”

“Get this note from this woman before she changes it,” and unwillingly Dick went out of the room to do her bidding, while Ann walked to the looking-glass and tried to remove the traces of discomfiture, dust and tears from her face with a damp pocket-handkerchief.

The smart little widow had run up to her bedroom when she left her lodger's sitting-room, and two or three minutes passed before he could make her hear him and find her, as the servant had gone out. When she came out on the landing in answer to his call he went straight to his point at once.

“Give me back that fiver I gave you to-day and I'll give you gold instead. There is something wrong about it, I fancy.”

"Wrong? oh! what a nuisance! I have sent Mary down to the village to change it and pay the butcher's bill."

"Go after her and stop it, there's a dear soul," he said coaxingly.

"It's so hot to go out now! and by the time I get down there she will have changed it and paid the bill."

"Do go and get it back," he pleaded, at the same time handing her five sovereigns.

"Tell me why, and I'll go, Mr. Ogilvie."

"I don't know myself yet—this old cousin of my mother's gave it to me, and *she* wants it stopped."

"If it doesn't concern you I shall not trouble myself about it," she said coolly.

"But you see if there's anything wrong about it, it concerns me and you and every one who has endorsed it."

"Oh!—then I will try to catch it up," she promised laughingly, and a minute or two later she went out in search of her messenger to the butcher.

"Mrs. Watts had already sent it down to the village to get it changed, but she has gone herself to try and get it back," he said carelessly, "and now perhaps you will tell me why you are making such an infernal fuss about it."

"Get the other one back first, she cried," wringing her hands, "then I'll tell you. Oh! why did I give them to you, why did I give them to you!"

"Why, indeed, if you were going to make such a devil of a fuss about it," he said crossly. "I suppose I had better send a wire to the man at the 'Stanmer Arms' and tell him to stop it if he can."

"No, no, *don't* send any messages or put pen to paper about it," she cried wildly. "Go, go yourself and do your all to get it back as soon as this woman comes in with the other one. Are you sure these are the only ones you have changed?"

"Quite sure!" he said curtly. He exceedingly disliked being ordered about in this way on her business. To have to go down to Prior Common this evening would be a horrible nuisance. It would upset both his dinner and his plans, for he had promised to go for a walk with Mrs. Watts and pick blackberries. Picking blackberries was not much in his line, but the doing so afforded him a plausible excuse for sauntering through secluded lanes with

a woman who liked him immensely, and was intensely flattered at receiving the smallest attention from him. He felt a greater repugnance to his mother's old cousin than ever as he reflected that through some stupidity of hers he would be deprived of these harmless pleasures this evening.

"What is the news with your people? How is Sylvia?" he asked while they were waiting for Mrs. Watts's return.

Ann had been bitterly conscious during the half-hour which she had spent with him that her idol had been disliking her and finding her a bore. Now her turn had come. She took it.

"They are all quite well, and Sylvia was married this morning."

"What!"

"Safely enough married at two o'clock to-day; everything very nicely done, but quiet, and she's gone off on her honeymoon as proud as you please."

He walked to the window and stood for some minutes motionlessly gazing out into the garden, which he did not see. She knew that there were tears in his eyes though she could not see them, and the hatred deepened in her heart against Sylvia.

"She shall be brought so low some day that he'll shed no more tears of love for her," she thought savagely, longing to wring the heart of the man for whom she was ready to peril her soul, because that heart was nearly breaking for another woman.

"Here comes Mrs. Watts," he said abruptly, turning round, "and I don't care a d—— whether she has got the note back or not."

CHAPTER XIX.

DICK IS PUZZLED.

"I CAN'T think what is the matter with Ann," Mrs. Gould said to Lily the day after the wedding. "She went out yesterday in the afternoon without asking leave, though I had visitors in the house; came home very late, and this morning she has asked me to pay her wages up to date and let her go."

"Perhaps she is tired of the place."

"But surely she might have waited till her month was up."

"I should gladly send her off if I were you, mamma. I don't

like to see her horrid brown hands and face near my light frocks and hats."

"I wanted to get rid of her, otherwise I shouldn't have given her notice, but I can't understand her going in such a hurry."

"She looks to me like a man in woman's clothes. At one time Sylvia said she would take her on as her maid when she was married. But for the last week or two she hasn't seemed to think so much of Ann."

"Mr. Christopher would never have heard of that arrangement, Lily."

"I don't know, mamma. I think Mr. Christopher will hear of a good many things that he is not prepared for from Sylvia."

"I wonder where they are to-day, and what she is doing," the mother sighed.

"They'll be at Bray to-day, and Mr. Christopher will be scolding Sylvia if the tenants have let the houses get out of repair, and most likely Sylvia will be giving Bubble and Squeak a bath in the sea about this time."

"I am longing for her first letter, we shall be able to gather so *much* from that."

Lily laughed.

"I'm so glad I know that you expect the first letter to reveal so much, mamma. Forewarned is forearmed. If ever I am married I shall take care that my first letter does not reveal too much."

"A telegram, ma'am," the servant said, coming in at the moment, and Mrs. Gould opened it and read :

"To Mrs. Gould, 10, Blessington Terrace, London.

"Have lost Bubble and Squeak ; shall not leave Dublin till I find them. Mr. Christopher goes to Bantry without me. Rather like Dublin and shall amuse myself very well. Don't fret too much ; they may be found. Wire reply ; it takes so long to write.

"From Mrs. Christopher,
"Shelburn Hotel, Dublin."

"I must send a telegram *at once* to Mr. Christopher not on any account to leave Sylvia alone in Dublin. They must both be mad to think of such a thing."

Mrs. Gould spoke distractedly and therefore rather shrilly.

Her tones carried beyond the bounds for which they were intended and fell upon the ears of Ann, who was hovering in the passage, her boxes packed, waiting for her wages. Mrs. Gould read out the whole telegram, addresses and all, a second time, and Ann laid the Dublin one up in her memory.

"If I were in your place I shouldn't wire," Lily said, looking up hastily. She was rather exercised in her own mind at the moment as to whether the Chantilly lace with which she was befrilling a harebell blue silk blouse would hold out or not. Nevertheless she unselfishly gave her mind to the consideration of the dilemma in which her mother was plunged.

"You see," she went on convincingly, "you are not responsible for Sylvia any longer; Mr. Christopher has taken the burden of all that on his own shoulders, and probably if you give them advice they'll enter into an alliance and throw it back to you without thanks."

"Ah! you're not her mother, Lily."

"No, thank goodness I'm not! If I were, I should be offering up a thanksgiving to-day for having got rid of her so creditably."

"Any answer, ma'am?"

"Yes, yes; I must wire. Lily, what shall I say?"

"The boy says he can't wait any longer, ma'am. I'm going to the office myself; shall I take the telegram?" Ann asked, pushing her way past the housemaid into the room.

"Yes, Ann. Lily, find me a telegram form."

Lily slowly rose to obey her mother's request.

"They are up on your bed-room writing table," she said, and went out of the room.

"Just pencil down the message and I'll write it on a form at the office; it will save time. I have to go there myself before I take my boxes away," Ann said hurriedly, and Mrs. Gould, glad to get over the task, wrote:

"Mrs. Christopher, Shelburn Hotel, Dublin.

"Pray do not remain in Dublin; go to Bantry with your husband. Am writing."

Ann was out of the house with it before Lily came back.

"I upset the gum-pot over your table in taking up the forms; that delayed me," she explained.

"Never mind. Ann has taken it."

"I almost think it's a pity you let Ann know Sylvia's address," Lily said indifferently.

"Why?"

"Because she's a cousin, or a friend, or a something of Mr. Richard Ogilvie's."

Mrs. Gould shivered.

"I wish with all my heart I had never heard of either the Ogilvies or Ann; but, thank heaven, the woman leaves us to-day, and I trust we may never see or hear of her again."

"I think we shall hear of her when the bank notes are traced," Lily said calmly. Then she went on trimming her harebell blue blouse.

An hour after this, Ann, her boxes and her wages, were gone for ever from Blessington Terrace.

There had been a good deal that was disagreeable compressed into the ten minutes that passed between Mrs. Watts's coming back and Ann's departure from Dick Ogilvie's. Mrs. Watts came back hot, tired, unsuccessful; and a little cross at being this last, she saluted Dick with the words:

"I have been on a fool's errand. Of course when I got to the butcher's Mary had been there, changed the bank note, paid the bill and gone gadding goodness knows where. That's the worst of sending that girl on an errand, she never knows when to come back."

"Never mind the girl; you got back the note from this butcher, I suppose?" Dick asked. He really did not very much care whether she had done so or not, only he wanted to get rid of Ann and be left free to think of Sylvia—married!

"No, I couldn't get it back; the butcher was just sending up a lot of cheques to his London banker, and he inclosed the five-pound note with them. Never keeps much money in the house, he says; there have been so many burglaries about lately. What's the matter?"

Ann had given vent to a sound that was between a groan and a yell.

"Nothing, only I've pricked myself under the thumb-nail with my brooch-pin," Ann said agitatedly. "Dick, I must speak to you alone for a minute or two."

"Certainly ; I won't intrude on you, Mr. Ogilvie," Mrs. Watts said huffily, leaving the room, and then the harassed Dick felt that the additional burden was laid upon him of having to smooth down Mrs. Watts's ruffled plumes when "the other poisonous woman went."

"Now what is it? Out with it," he said impatiently, as soon as they were alone. "What is all this rumpus about?"

"The numbers of these notes are known, and they're advertised for. I don't want it to come out how I got them."

"I don't care a hang how you got them. I'll give you back every stiver you lent me that day when you knew I was hard up, and came tempting me to take your cursed money."

"They won't be brought home to me, don't you see?" she said nervously. "I handed them to you without ever putting my name on their backs. It's *you* that have signed them."

"You stole them!" he said sternly.

"No, no, no. Not so bad as that ; I gave good worth for the money. I didn't steal it, Dick," she said humbly.

"Do leave off 'Dick'-ing me every moment, and tell me plainly, if you can, what you're in such a funk about, if you didn't steal them."

"Oh ! I'm miserable, that I am, and misled, and no thanks do I get from you for having got the money for you ; no thanks, nor pity either."

"No, devil a bit of thanks or pity either, if you came by them unfairly."

"You are hard, very hard on me," she said, crying copiously ; "but it's no good wasting time now. Go down to the public-house where you changed the other, to-night, and get *that* back at all events."

"All right. Will you have some tea or anything?"

"Tea ! no, thank you. I don't want tea, or anything but a bit of feeling for me from you."

"Why didn't you tell me this marriage was coming off to-day?"

"Because I didn't think you had such a poor spirit as to care whether it came off or not," she said viciously. "*She* hasn't so much as named you for a long time ; all her thoughts have been given to her finery and her grand home."

"I don't believe it," he said firmly.

"Well, believe it or not, she's married now; you can't undo that, and I don't suppose you want to."

"God bless her! I wouldn't hurt a hair of her head," he said fervently, feeling quite pious as he renounced that which it was next to impossible he could get. Then he added hurriedly:

"You'll just catch a train if you start now; if you lose it you won't get one till ten-fifteen, and that will make you late."

She did start, unwillingly enough, without gaining one gracious word from Dick. She was obliged to stop several times on her way to the station to sop up her tears. This delayed her. She missed her train, and only caught the ten-fifteen one, consequently she reached home late at night, as has already been mentioned.

Mrs. Watts skipped into Dick's room as soon as his visitor had departed.

"It is vexatious, she has spoiled your dinner; everything is overdone, for it will be more than half-an-hour late, and that wretched Mary has only just come in."

"I don't want any dinner," he said wearily.

"Nonsense! nonsense! Go out into the garden while I air the room. Rooms always want airing after people like your old friend have been crying and fuming in them. Your dinner *isn't* spoiled. I have taken care of that. It's stewed steak, and that can't spoil, however long it waits, if it stews gently."

"I seem to have been stewing gently, myself, for the last two hours. If you will kindly let me off that blackberrying business to-night, I shall feel awfully grateful. I ought to go to Prior Common—twelve miles cross-country, for I must drive."

"Why not wire?" she asked.

"Is there time?" he asked irresolutely.

And on her telling him, "Yes, it wasn't too late," he wired as follows:

"To Landlord of 'Stanmer Arms,' Prior Common.

"Don't change fiver I gave you, it's fishy. With you to-morrow.

"OGILVIE."

Mary took the telegram to the office at once, and Mrs. Watts waited on her lodger herself at his dinner, and it was all "very

pleasant," *she* thought, though he was rather more stand-off in his manner than usual. The fact is, he was thinking very much, and very chivalrously, of Sylvia, and calling himself "an infernal scoundrel" for letting this frisky widow coquet round him while he dined, and rest her hand on his shoulder while she intreated him to take "more" from the dishes she handed so deftly.

But all her trouble and blandishments were in vain. She got no blackberrying with him that evening.

* * * * *

It really seemed as if he was being rewarded for resisting the wiles of this second-rate Circe, when the last post brought him a letter from his mother's solicitors, telling him that they had been successful in establishing the identity of his father, Arthur Ogilvie, who had married his mother at the parish church of Kennington, in the month of June, 18—, with that of the Arthur Ogilvie who had changed his name to Stanmer for the Dene Prior property.

His first thought was naturally one of profound elation for himself. His next was:

"Poor young fellow! How badly he'll feel it! My own brother, too. I must get hold of him to-morrow."

(To be continued.)



